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# Marketing Stadiums as Event Venues

## *Modified Balanced Scorecard (mBSC) Evaluation of Minor League Baseball Websites as an eMarketing Tool*

Charles Parrish  
Seungwon “Shawn” Lee  
Ji-Ho Kim

### Abstract

Maximizing and gaining access to stadium related revenue streams, including non-game day social and corporate event rentals, is a critical factor for the financial viability of professional sports teams. Minor League Baseball (MiLB) teams and Independent baseball league (Indy) teams are no exception and franchise owners strive to maximize ancillary business opportunities, including stadium usage year-round. Currently, teams are marketing their venues through various mediums, including their websites. Considering the implications of eMarketing on MiLB and Indy teams' ability to target and solicit social and corporate event customers it is critical to evaluate current eMarketing efforts. This study employs the Modified Balanced Scorecard (mBSC) approach to website evaluation and aims to a) evaluate the contents and design of minor league (MiLB and Indy) baseball teams' websites as a marketing tool for their stadiums and b) to identify trends of minor league baseball stadium use as social and corporate event venues. Research findings provide researchers and industry professionals with empirical evidence of the current positioning of minor league baseball stadiums as social and corporate event venues. The authors also discuss how teams can improve their eMarketing strategy to better engage social and corporate event clients.

**Keywords:** *stadiums; event/meeting venue; eMarketing; modified balanced score card (mBSC); Minor League Baseball*

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Between 1990 and 2010, construction costs for major U.S. professional sports stadiums exceeded \$30 billion (Baade & Matheson, 2012). Many of these venues, including outdoor stadiums, have been designed to maximize facility-related revenue by accommodating a variety of “special events” on non-game days, such as business meetings, seminars, trade shows, and weddings (Lee, Kim, & Parrish, 2012). By accommodating social and corporate events, stadium stakeholders, including sports teams, are able to maximize their collective return on investment (ROI). Further, sport organizations with the capacity to generate supplemental business by hosting non-game day events can enhance their bottom line.

The emphasis on maximizing stadium-related revenue also applies to minor league sports teams. As Johnson (1993) noted in his earlier work on Minor League Baseball (MiLB), in the 1950s, team owners met declining interest with innovative business strategies, including clever marketing schemes and promotional packages. Today, minor league baseball teams remain at the forefront of innovative sports promotions in order to maintain their appeal to consumers seeking entertainment value. However, the 1990 Professional Baseball Agreement (PBA), which governs the relationship between MLB teams and their minor league affiliates, and a key amendment to this agreement in 1997 have threatened the financial viability of MiLB franchises and leagues. Specifically, the 1997 version of the PBA resulted in reductions in the amount of subsidies provided to MiLB teams which resulted in minor league franchises assuming more of the expenses associated with the operation of the team. For example, since 1997 MiLB teams have assumed the responsibility for umpiring costs as well as their own equipment, including player uniforms (Johnson, 1998). Also, the minimum stadium standards provision of the PBA, which applies to both new and existing venues, has forced MiLB teams to actively seek additional public financial support to offset costs stemming from the mandated stadium upgrades. According to Attachment 58 of the PBA, each stadium must meet a minimal standard with respect to providing adequate seating, public comfort stations (e.g., restrooms), concession and vending spaces, public common areas (e.g., picnic/beer garden), ticket windows and entry turnstiles, security and first aid, parking and accessibility, sound system and scoreboard, media facilities, administrative areas, team facilities (e.g., dressing rooms, batting tunnels, etc.), and playing fields (e.g., quality lighting, dimensions, etc.) (Baade & Sanderson, 1997).

While the PBA has left MiLB teams searching for ways to mitigate rising costs, it can be argued that Independent professional baseball teams (Indy) face even greater challenges to their financial welfare. To begin, Indy teams are not affiliated with MLB franchises and therefore do not receive subsidies. Further, because Indy teams are not bound by PBA regulations, they do not adhere to the territorial restrictions outlined in the agreement. Consequently, Indy teams often operate within the same markets as MLB and MiLB teams. Given Indy league talent is perceived to be inferior to MiLB, Indy teams have a difficult time attracting enough

spectators to support the organization's operations and this results in instability (Agha, 2013). These scenarios place significant importance on Indy league owners to maximize all revenue streams to cover their operational expenses.

To meet these challenges, minor league baseball owners (MiLB and Indy) strive to maximize ancillary business opportunities, including stadium usage year-round. Specifically, many MiLB and Indy franchises are developing banquet and entertainment spaces within their venues to increase the overall revenue-generating potential of the facility (Solomon, 2012). As professional sports franchises increasingly seek to attract social and corporate events to their venues on non-game days it is important to consider how and to what degree this is achieved. Currently, teams are marketing their venues through various mediums, including their websites. In today's business world this type of marketing strategy (eMarketing) is common as the Internet is a useful communication tool that provides a valuable marketing platform for sport-based organizations (Delpy & Bosetti, 1998; Seo & Green, 2008). Specifically, websites are highly effective mediums to reach potential customers and their attributes influence a customer's intent to purchase (Bai, Law, & Wen, 2008; Chen, Hsu, & Lin, 2010; Hausman & Siekpe, 2009) as well as overall customer satisfaction (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2011; McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002; Muylle, Moenaert, & Despontin, 2004; Szymanski & Hise, 2000).

Considering the implications of eMarketing on MiLB and Indy teams' ability to target and solicit social and corporate events as well as the importance of possessing the key features and services required to support these functions, the purpose of this empirical study is twofold: a) to evaluate the contents of minor league baseball (MiLB and Indy) teams' websites as a marketing tool for their stadiums and b) to identify trends of minor league baseball stadium use as social and corporate event venues. Research findings will provide both academicians and industry professionals empirical evidence on the current positioning of minor league baseball stadiums as social and corporate event venues as well as identifying how teams can improve their eMarketing strategies to better engage prospective social and corporate event clients.

## Literature Review

### Minor League Baseball

Minor League Baseball (MiLB), formerly known as The National Association of Professional Baseball, was formed in 1901 and provides bylaws for all teams affiliated with MLB franchises to abide by (Agha, 2013; Minor League Baseball [MiLB], n.d.; Sullivan, 1995). Currently, there are over 160 MiLB teams across the United States and Mexico organized according to the assessed skill level of the players. Leagues are classified into categories ranging from lowest skill level to highest: Rookie League, A, AA, and AAA. The A level is subdivided into three distinct classifications, including Short Season A, A, and Advanced A. Indepen-

dent minor league professional baseball (Indy) teams are not affiliated with MiLB or MLB and are free to operate within the rules set forth by their respective league office. Currently, there are eight different Indy leagues with over 60 teams in the United States and Canada.

While empirical research on minor league baseball may be underrepresented in comparison with major league professional sports, the literature base is well developed and provides a number of key findings with implications to guide management and administrative decisions. In general, minor league baseball research can be conceptualized as representing two broad areas of interest. The first addresses the economics associated with the operation of minor league teams and stadiums (Agha, 2013; Baade & Sanderson, 1997; Colclough, Daellenbach, & Sherony, 1994; Johnson, 1991; Johnson, 1998; Rosentraub & Swindell, 1991). The other seeks to identify predictors of fan attendance (Bernthal & Graham, 2003; Branvold, Pan, & Gabert, 1997; Cebula, 2009; Cebula, Toma, & Carmichael, 2009; Gifis & Sommers 2006; Gitter & Rhoads, 2010, 2011, in press; Lachowetz, Dees, Todd, & Ryan 2009; Paul, Toma, & Weinbach, 2009; Siegfried & Eisenberg, 1980). Certainly, there are published studies that do not fit neatly into these two categories (Davis, 2006 & 2007; Krautmann, Gustafson, and Hadley, 2000; Surdam, 2005; Winfree, 2005; Yokum, Gonzalez, and Badgett, 2006); however, an extensive review of the literature indicates team/stadium economics and attendance are the most developed researched lines of inquiry as they have been thoroughly examined by a number of scholars over several decades.

### **Stadiums as Corporate and Social Event Venues**

The economic success of professional sports teams across all levels of competition depends on myriad factors beyond success on the field (O'Reilly & Nadeau, 2006). Teams often seek to generate profits through licensed products, media rights, merchandising, sponsorship, and endorsements among other sources (Ammon Jr., Southall, & Nagel, 2010). While gate receipts account for approximately 35% to 45% of minor league baseball revenue, franchises have sought to reduce this dependency by identifying, developing, and maximizing other sources of facility revenue (Solomon, 2012). In addition to luxury suites and club seating, personal seat licensing, concessions, parking, naming rights, and stadium advertising, facility rental agreements help reduce an organization's dependency on ticket sales and can generate substantial revenue as an ancillary business. Beyond the large main event areas in and around a sports stadium, teams now market the smaller intricate spaces within their facility to individuals, social groups, businesses, corporations, and event/meeting planners seeking a unique site for their event. While social and corporate events often occur in conjunction with the sports event itself many are also scheduled on non-game days throughout the year.

Kim, Jeon, Lee, and Parrish (2013) developed a conceptual model for the attractiveness of professional sports facilities as social and corporate event venues.

One of the key attributes identified is a venue's ability to satisfy the key site selection criteria prospective corporate and social event customers require. These include logistical infrastructure (e.g., podium, microphone, furniture, etc.), quality food and beverage, cost, location, adequate parking, capacity and layout, audio/visual aids, and meeting and event services. Other attributes the authors suggest influence a sport venue's attractiveness as a site for social and corporate events are sport team value, sport involvement of event attendees, and fit between type of event and sports team.

Although qualitatively different from traditional purpose built events and meetings venues (e.g., convention centers, hotels, and conference centers), sports stadiums are considered a type of public assembly venue with infrastructure to accommodate a variety of event and meeting functions (Fenich & Bordelon, 2008). Specifically, Lee et al. (2012) have confirmed functional support for a range of social and corporate events at many major outdoor professional sports stadiums exists, including audio/visual aids, ample parking, and quality food and beverage service among other features and services. However, Lee et al. concluded MLB, NFL, and MLS teams' website quality in marketing special event hosting varies. Currently, it is unclear if similar key site features and services are available across minor league baseball stadiums. Also, there is no research available that evaluates minor league baseball team website quality with respect to targeting prospective social and corporate event clients.

### Events and Meetings Industry and Site Selection

The most recent figures provided by the *2014 Economic Impact of Meetings to the U.S. Economy* by the Convention Industry Council (CIC) and Price, Waterhouse, and Coopers estimated a \$115 billion value for the events and meetings industry, which represents an 8.97% increase from its 2011 report. Specifically, the CIC indicated 1.29 million corporate/business meetings, 273,700 conventions/conferences, 182,600 "other events" (including social events), and 10,900 trade shows were held in 2012 in the United States. In total, these events account for \$10.36 billion in spending on venue rental (Convention Industry Council, 2014). These figures represent an opportunity for sports organizations to generate significant supplemental income by tapping into this market. However, it is important to note stadiums must satisfy certain site selection criteria to successfully attract this type of business. Crouch and Ritchie's (1998) synthesis of the literature identified a wide variety of factors related to meeting and event site selection. While the literature on site selection attributes of event and meeting purposed built venues (e.g. hotels, convention centers, exhibition halls) is well developed, few studies have focused on unique non-traditional event and meeting venues. The exceptions include Fawzy's (2008) and Phillips and Geddie's (2005) exploration of cruise ships, Daniels, Lee, and Cohen's (2012) work on a country club/historic building, and Lau and Hui's (2010) study of a Chinese restaurant. With the exception of Lee

et al. (2012) and Kim et al. (2013), scholarship that considers outdoor professional sports stadiums as sites for social and corporate events is rare.

### **Sports Teams and eMarketing**

Like other business firms, sports organizations have incorporated the use of the Internet as part of their overall marketing strategy (Scholl & Carlson, 2012; Seo & Green, 2008). Since the late 1990s a number of studies have been conducted to explore the use of the Internet within the sports industry. As part of their theoretical investigation of the relationship between sport website quality, e-satisfaction, and e-loyalty, Hur, Ko, and Valacich (2011) provided a detailed synthesis of much of this literature and indicate these “studies have focused on the function of the internet for sports businesses, website content analysis, and demographic profiles” (p. 459). Other studies have indicated sports teams’ use their websites as a tool to connect their product directly to fans (Brown, 2003; Ioakimidis, 2010; Seo, Green, Ko, Lee, & Schenewark, 2007) by providing team related information, developing team and fan identities, and expanding the commercial capabilities of the business (Scholl & Carlson, 2012).

While a number of studies have been conducted to explore the performance of websites as a marketing tool (Negash, Ryan, & Igbaria, 2003; Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002; Yuan, Morrison, Linton, Feng, & Jeon, 2004) and reliable tools and constructs to assess website quality have been developed (Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2011; Lociacono, Watson, & Goodhue, 2007; Morrison, Taylor, Morrison, & Morrison, 1999; Park & Gretzel, 2007) there are few studies that specifically evaluate the performance of a sports team’s website to effectively market its stadium as a social and corporate event venue. Most purpose-built meeting and event venues use the Web to communicate directly with prospective customers (Schmidt, Cantalops, & Santos, 2008). Likewise, professional sports teams seeking to gain market share in the meetings and events industry must also provide well designed websites that effectively segment and communicate relevant information to clients seeking unique venues to host social or corporate events. Given the importance of the design and content of a website on a team’s ability to sell products and services it is necessary to explore the quality of website design to assess if it is effectively meeting the needs of prospective social and corporate events clients.

### **Website Evaluation and Modified Balanced Scorecard (mBSC)**

Despite a variance in terminology (e.g., website quality, website performance, e-service quality), scholars have thoroughly examined the evaluation of websites (Park & Gertzel, 2007). Further, researchers in the events and meetings industry have long agreed on a need to establish and systematically use common criteria when evaluating website quality (O’Conner & Frew, 2004; Morrison, Taylor, and Douglas, 2004). Park and Gertzel (2007) synthesized of over 150 academic articles related to website quality and identified nine key dimensions, including information quality, security, privacy, ease of use, responsiveness, interactivity, visual

aesthetics, trust, personalization, and fulfillment. Similarly, Ko and Hur (2005) synthesized literature from the fields of marketing, information systems, retailing, and computer science to identify key dimensions in sports website quality. These include information, interaction, design, system reliability, and fulfillment.

One of the most comprehensive website evaluation instruments in the events, meetings, and tourism industry is the Modified Balanced Scorecard (mBSC) by Morrison et al. (1999), which was modeled around Kaplan and Norton's (1992) Balanced Scorecard (BSC), and it has been used in many previous academic website evaluation studies (e.g., Douglas & Mills, 2004; Feng, Morrison, & Ismail, 2003; Ismail, Labropoulos, Mills, & Morrison, 2002; Myung, Morrison, & Taylor, 2005; Lee et al., 2012; Stepchenkova, Tang, Jang, Kirilenko, & Morrison, 2010). The mBSC consists of four performance perspectives that incorporate 99 evaluation criteria. The four perspectives include customer friendliness and usability (customer perspective), marketing effectiveness (marketing perspective), level of information provided (destination information perspective), and technical functionality (technical perspective). The measurement of the customer, marketing, and information perspectives are based on "yes-no" questions that relate to the presence (value = 1) or absence (value = 0) of a specific website feature.

## Methodology

### Boundary of the Study and Sample

This study evaluated the websites of Minor League Baseball (MiLB) teams and Independent professional baseball (Indy) teams in residence at stadiums constructed after 1990 in the United States. This design decision was based on the impact of the mandated stadium regulations outlined in the Professional Baseball Agreement of 1990 on Minor League Baseball venues. As Johnson (1998) and Agha (2013) note, the PBA stadium standards were in part responsible for a boom in minor league stadium construction after 1990 as well as an increase in franchise relocations as teams sought out venues that were in compliance. Also, this time frame coincides with the recent resurgence and development of Indy league stadiums. An assumption of this design decision is modern stadiums constructed over the past two decades will have many of the key features and services social and corporate event clients demand and thus these venues warrant particular attention. In an effort to maintain consistency across the data set only team websites were evaluated. Finally, team websites excluded from this study include the AAA level Mexican League, two Indy teams based in the French-Canadian Province of Quebec, and MiLB Rookie League teams. The international team websites (Mexico & Canada) were omitted due to language barriers. The exclusion of Rookie League team websites was based on an initial exploration of these websites, which revealed both the websites and the venues in which Rookie League teams typically compete were assessed by the researchers to be too simplistic to warrant inclusion. This finding was logical given Rookie League teams play less than two months



out of the year, do not charge admission fees, and do not actively seek to generate other forms of revenue (Solomon, 2012).

Based on the established criteria for inclusion in the study outlined above the complete research sample consisted of 134 team websites. Specifically, the websites of 32 of 61 (53%) Indy teams, 55 of 82 (67%) A level MiLB teams, 26 of 30 (87%) AA level MiLB teams, and 21 of 46 (46%) AAA level MiLB teams were analyzed.

### **Website Evaluation and Data Analysis**

The goal of this research was to evaluate professional minor league baseball teams' websites as eMarketing tools to solicit business from prospective social and corporate event clients. In this study, the Morrison et al. (1999) approach was modified to evaluate the teams' websites. Specifically, the technical perspective was excluded to better reflect the objectives of the study. Based on an extensive literature review grounded in events and meetings venue selection criteria and website evaluation, the following three dimensions of the mBSC were utilized to evaluate the websites: (a) information perspective, (b) customer perspective, and (c) marketing effectiveness perspective.

Within these three dimensions, website evaluation criteria items were developed based on a multifaceted approach that integrated previously validated studies on key meeting and event venue selection criteria as well as website evaluation studies. A total of 10 criterion items were evaluated based on careful observations of teams' websites tested by Lee et al. (2012) in order to ensure the items were relevant to the sport stadium context. The evaluation criteria utilized for this study are 1) on-site catering, which is the availability of exclusive on-site catering service (information perspective); 2) direction, which is the availability of stadium directions and parking information (information perspective); 3) capacity of space, which is the availability of capacity information for available meeting/event spaces across various room set ups (information perspective); 4) online request for proposal (RFP), which is the availability of an online RFP form (information perspective); 5) pricing, which is the availability of price information for hosting meetings/events at the venue (customer perspective); 6) navigability, which is the easiness of navigation to event planning information (customer perspective); 7) event contact information, which is the availability of direct contact information for event specific personnel/department (customer perspective); 8) target marketing, which is the ability to target event/meeting customers with a designated tab for meeting/event planning (marketing perspective); 9) positioning, which is the availability of a marketing theme/slogan of uniqueness of stadiums as an event venue (marketing perspective); and 10) tangibility, which is the availability of visual appeal of stadiums in meeting/event setting such as photos from an actual event or room/table/food and beverage set up (marketing perspective).

A counting method and a nominal "present/not present" scale were employed to analyze the websites. The counting method, which is recognized as the most

adopted approach for evaluating a website's performance or determining its content richness (Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010), was used to identify and tabulate the frequency of specific features of website contents. First, a checklist using items from existing evaluation models was mutually developed to verify the existence of attributes on a website. Second, the first two authors utilized the checklist to conduct the counting analysis separately and tested a subset of the data results to measure inter-rater reliability using the Cohen's Kappa statistical technique. The cumulative Cohen's Kappa for the Indy League ( $n = 32$ ) and MiLB AA teams' ( $n = 26$ ) websites in this study was .869 ( $p < .001$ ), which indicates almost perfect agreement between the researchers (Landis & Koch, 1977). Finally, a nominal "present/not present" scale was adopted from previous website evaluation studies to mitigate variance of qualitative assessments (Ham, 2004; Wan, 2002). The "market segmentation/target marketing" criterion in the marketing effectiveness dimension was the only item requiring expert judgment of the authors. As suggested by Wan (2002), the authors examined the websites with academic and industry expertise resulting in reduced bias in the evaluation process. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical technique was conducted to test for any differences in summated mBSC scores among the leagues.

## Results

This section consists of the following results of the data analysis: (a) profile of evaluated websites, (b) frequency of key event types and available event features and service in the websites, (c) mBSC website performance across the three dimensions, and (d) mBSC website evaluation by ANOVA.

Table 1 depicts the profile of researched websites. The majority (79.1%) of minor league teams playing in stadiums built after 1990 manage their stadium's operations as either a tenant/operator or owner/operator. Over 45% of the stadiums selected for inclusion in this study were publicly financed and 44% were financed with a combination of public and private monies. Interestingly, only 10% of stadiums in this sample were financed by the private sector alone. Finally, of all the individual leagues across MiLB and Indy, the Frontier League of Independent baseball has constructed the most stadiums since 1990. Specifically, 12 of the 14 teams, or (approximately 86%) were playing in stadiums constructed during the period analyzed.

### Assessment of the Sport Teams' Website Contents and Functions

Table 2 shows the cumulative frequency of types of events listed as "can be hosted" on the websites included in this study. Overall, the types of events that appeared the most often include Birthday party (125), Business/Corporate/Private meetings (116), Business/Corporate/Social Outing (72), Wedding (60), Convention/Trade Show/Job Fair (48), Company recreational events (44), Concert/Music Shows (42) and holiday party (34) by the order of frequency. In regard to avail-

**Table 1***Profile of the Samples (n= 134)*

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
League affiliation		
Independent league		
Atlantic league	8	6.0
American Association of Independent	9	6.7
Canadian American Association	3	2.2
Frontier League	12	9.0
Sub Total	32	23.9
Single A league		
ShortA New York-Penn League	11	8.2
ShortA Northwest League	4	3.0
A Midwest League	11	8.2
A South Atlantic League	11	8.2
AdvA California League	6	4.5
AdvA Carolina League	6	4.5
AdvA Florida State League	6	4.5
Sub total	55	41.1
Double A league		
Eastern League	9	6.7
Southern League	9	6.7
Texas League	8	6.0
Sub Total	26	19.4
Triple A League		
International League	10	7.5
Pacific Coast League	11	8.2
Sub Total	21	15.7
Type of Stadium Operator		
Tenant	28	20.9
Tenant as Operator	89	66.4
Owner as Operator	17	12.7
Type of Stadium Construction Financing		
Public	61	45.5
Mix of Public and Private	59	44.0
Private	14	10.4

*Note.* Due to rounding, not all percents sum to 100.0%.

able corporate and social event features/services, outdoor event space (94) was the feature that appeared the most, followed by on-site catering service (81), video scoreboard display (72), exclusive indoor executive/luxury suite (70), Audio/Visual service (62), and dedicated indoor event/meeting space (60) by order.

**Table 2**

*Ranking by Frequency of Event Types and Event Features/Services in the Websites*

	Rank	Items	Frequency (n = 134)	Percentile
Types of non-sporting events that can be hosted	1	Birthday party	125	93.3%
	2	Business/Corporate/Private meeting	116	86.6%
	3	Business/Corporate/Social outing (picnic)	72	53.7%
	4	Wedding	60	44.8%
	5	Convention/Trade Show/Job Fair	48	41.8%
	6	Recreational company Events (Team building)	44	35.8%
	7	Concert/Music Shows	42	32.8%
	8	Holiday Party	34	31.3%
	9	Business/Corporate Party	33	25.4%
	10	Reunion (Class/Family)	32	24.6%
	11	Networking/Social Event/Mixers	26	23.9%
	12	Celebrity/Charity Fundraiser Event	22	19.4%
	13	Carnival/Circus/Festival Event	22	16.4%
	14	Formal Dinner/Award Banquet/Reception	21	16.4%
	15	School Event/Graduation	19	15.7%
Event feature/service available	1	Outdoor Event Space (Picnic Area/Pavilion)	94	70.1%
	2	On-Site Catering Service	81	60.4%
	3	Videoboard Display (Jumbotron)	72	53.7%
	4	Exclusive Indoor Executive/Luxury Suite	70	52.2%
	5	Audio/Visual Aids	62	46.3%
	6	Dedicated Event/Meeting Space	60	44.8%
	7	Playground/Activity Area	45	33.6%
	8	Furniture (Bar/Cocktail/Lounge Style)	40	29.9%
	9	Bar/Sports Bar/Lounge	35	26.1%
	10	Field Access	26	19.4%
	11	On-site Event Staff	26	19.4%
	12	Internet/WiFi Access	14	10.4%
	13	Abundance of On-Site Parking	12	9.0%
	14	Private Restrooms	12	9.0%
	15	Flexible Layout/Service Style	11	8.2%

### **mBSC Analysis of Websites: Performance Frequency across the Three Perspectives**

Table 3 indicates website performance based on the presence of each of the key criteria items of the mBSC analysis across the three perspectives. Based on the mBSC analysis the criteria items most frequently present on minor league baseball team websites were directions (95.5%), navigability (65.7%), and event-specific contact information (61.2%). The criteria items most frequently absent from team websites were an online RFP (87.3%), stadium positioning statement (79.1%),

pricing information (77.6%), and targeting prospective event and meeting clients by providing a dedicated events tab (73.9%).

**Table 3**  
*Frequency of Items in Each mBSC Perspective*

mBSC perspective	Item	Availability	Frequency	Percent (%)
Information	On-Site Catering	YES	56	41.8%
		NO	78	58.2%
	Direction	YES	128	95.5%
		NO	5	3.7%
	Online RFP	YES	17	12.7%
		NO	117	87.3%
	Capacity of Space	YES	74	55.2%
		NO	60	44.8%
Customer	Navigability	YES	88	65.7%
		NO	46	34.3%
	Pricing	YES	30	22.4%
		NO	104	77.6%
	Event Contact Info	YES	82	61.2%
		NO	52	38.8%
Marketing	Targeting Event/Meeting Customers	YES	35	26.1%
		NO	99	73.9%
	Positioning	YES	28	20.9%
		NO	106	79.1%
	Tangibility	YES	57	42.5%
		NO	77	57.5%

### **mBSC Website Performance Analysis: One-Way Analysis of Variance Test**

Each of the 134 team websites was assessed based on the aforementioned 10 criterion point totals and each received numerical performance scores based on the point totals. For example, a team website that satisfied all 10 criteria items across the three dimensions would receive a perfect numerical performance score of 10. A team website that provided nine of the criteria items would receive a numerical performance score of 9 and so on. Table 4 depicts the descriptive analysis of mean mBSC scores per dimension and standard deviation as well as total mBSC score by types and sub-types. The cumulative mBSC score rating for the websites

in this sample was 4.47 out of a possible ten criterion points. Therefore, it can be said there are opportunities for minor league baseball teams to make significant improvements to their websites' to better target prospective social and corporate event clients. Specifically, the average mBSC score for the information perspective was 2.07 out of 4. The mBSC score for the customer perspective was 1.49 out of 3. Finally, the mBSC score for the marketing perspective was 0.90 out of 3.

**Table 4**  
*mBSC Scores Per Dimension*

Type	Sub-type	mBSC Perspective						mBSC Total	
		Information		Customer		Marketing		Mean (Max = 10)	S.D.
		Mean (Max = 4)	S.D.	Mean (Max = 3)	S.D.	Mean (Max = 3)	S.D.		
League	Indy (n = 32)	2.16	0.88	1.56	0.95	.81	1.03	4.50	2.21
	A (n = 55)	1.78	0.92	1.44	1.00	.80	0.87	4.06	2.32
	AA (n = 26)	2.27	0.92	1.50	1.21	1.04	1.08	4.80	2.55
	AAA (n = 21)	2.43	1.08	1.52	1.03	1.10	0.94	5.05	2.46
	Sub Total	2.07	0.96	1.49	1.02	.90	0.96	3.66	2.38
Operator Status	Team as Tenant (n = 28)	1.43	0.84	1.00	0.98	.61	0.79	3.04	2.13
	Tenant/Operator (n = 89)	2.20	0.87	1.60	0.99	.93	0.96	4.73	2.21
	Owner/Operator (n = 17)	2.44	1.21	1.76	1.09	1.18	1.13	5.56	2.61
	Sub Total	2.07	0.96	1.49	1.02	.90	0.96	4.47	2.37
Financing	Public (n = 60)	2.12	0.94	1.34	1.01	.85	0.95	4.35	2.27
	Public & Private (n = 59)	2.12	1.00	1.68	0.97	.95	1.00	4.75	2.44
	Private (n = 14)	1.64	0.84	1.36	1.22	.86	0.86	3.86	2.48
	Sub Total	2.07	0.96	1.49	1.02	.90	0.96	4.47	2.37

The authors hypothesized that differences in website performance is dependent on whether or not the team operates the venue. To test this hypothesis a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test whether there is any difference in the mBSC scores of each dimension and total mBSC score among the different types of stadium operators (Group 1: team as tenant only; Group 2: team as tenant/operator; Group 3: team as owner/operator). A one way ANOVA showed that the effect of types of operator status was significant in the customer perspective,  $F(2,131) = 4.52, p = .013$ ; information perspective,  $F(2,131) = 9.24, p < .001$ ; and total mBSC score,  $F(2,131) = 8.192, p < .001$ .

In an effort to further identify which type of stadium operators differ from another, a post hoc test (Tukey) was conducted. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicate that the team as owner/operator group ( $M = 1.76$ , 95% CI [1.20, 2.33]) showed a significantly higher mean in customer perspective mBSC score than the tenant only group ( $M = 1.0$ ), 95% CI [0.61, 1.38]),  $p = .037$ ). Also, the mean score of the team as tenant/operator group ( $M = 1.60$ , 95% CI [1.39, 1.80]) was significantly higher than the tenant only group,  $p = .018$ . A

comparison between the team as owner/operator group and team as tenant/operator group in the mean mBSC score of customer perspective was not statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

The post hoc test indicated that the team as owner/operator group ( $M = 2.48$ , 95% CI [1.79, 3.08]) showed a significantly higher mean in the information perspective than the tenant only group ( $M = 1.43$ , 95% CI [1.10, 1.75]),  $p = .002$ ). Further, the mean score of the team as tenant/operator group ( $M = 2.20$ , 95% CI [2.02, 2.39]) was significantly higher than tenant only group,  $p < .001$ . A comparison between the team as owner/operator group and team as tenant/operator group in the mean in information perspective mBSC score was not statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

The same pattern of mean differences was found from the comparison of total mBSC score. The post hoc test indicated that the team as owner/operator group ( $M = 5.56$ , 95% CI [4.07, 4.88]) showed a significantly higher mean in total mBSC score than the tenant only ( $M = 3.04$ , 95% CI [2.21, 3.86]),  $p = .001$ ). The mean score of the team as tenant/operator group ( $M = 4.73$ , 95% CI [4.26, 5.20]) was significantly higher than the team as tenant only group,  $p = .002$ . A comparison between the team as owner/operator group and team as tenant/operator group in the mean in total mBSC score was not statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Finally, there was no statistically significant difference in the means of mBSC total among the various leagues (Independent league, Single A league, Double A league, and Triple A leagues) and financing types (Public, Public/Private, Private) at  $p < .05$  level.

## Conclusions and Implications

This study investigated the effectiveness of minor league baseball organizations' utilization of their websites to market their venues as host sites for social and corporate events. The 134 websites of minor league baseball teams in this study represent all Indy league and MiLB teams in residence at stadiums constructed after 1990. Each website was evaluated based on the mBSC technique with criteria established from the events and meetings management perspective.

The cumulative mBSC score rating for the websites in this sample was 4.47 out of a possible 10 criterion points. Therefore, it can be said there are opportunities for minor league baseball teams to make significant improvements to their websites' to better target prospective social and corporate event clients. The average mBSC score for the information perspective was 2.07 out of 4. The mBSC score for the customer perspective was 1.49 out of 3. Finally, the mBSC score for the marketing perspective was 0.90 out of 3. Specifically, minor league baseball teams can significantly improve the overall performance of their websites as an eMarketing tool by providing online request for proposals (RFP), information on pricing, a brand message or slogan that positions their venues as an event site, and a dedicated events tab. This study revealed each of these key criteria items

were consistently absent from teams websites. In general, this study also suggests there are many opportunities for minor league teams to improve their websites by providing information related to on-site catering, as only 41.8% of team websites provide this important information to prospective event clients.

On a positive note, it appears minor league team websites provide directions to the stadium 95.5% of the time. While this information is likely geared toward the general fan, it also satisfies one of the key site selection criteria event clients demand. Further, the team websites in this sample also satisfy event clients' demand for navigable websites, which is defined as the ability to find desired event related information within three "clicks." Finally, minor league baseball websites provide contact information for dedicated event specialists at the stadium most of the time (61.2%).

Interestingly, this study showed there are significant differences in website performance as an eMarketing tool depending on who the stadium operator is. Specifically, teams who operate their stadium (owner/operator or tenant/operator) use their website to market their venue as a social/corporate event site more effectively. Websites of teams that are tenants lacking the capacity to operate their stadiums had a significantly lower website performance score compared to the other two groups. This is logical since a team with no control over the use of the stadium or access to the revenue generated by non-game day events at the stadium would not allocate time and resources marketing the venue for such a purpose.

There was no significant difference in website performance among the different leagues across minor league baseball. This result was not surprising given the uniform structure of MiLB's website platform. MiLB's Baseball Internet Rights Company (BIRCO) is a company in which each team has an equity participation in. Since 2008, BIRCO has managed the digital media rights, including team websites, for all MiLB teams. In an effort to create a recognizable brand MiLB team owners all agreed to have a uniform website template and because of this uniformity BIRCO's website design has some control over the performance of the team websites across the various leagues. While MiLB teams across the leagues (A, AA, AAA) may not necessarily target similar customer markets nor have an equal need to market their stadiums as an event venue, the uniform structure of MiLB websites may limit a team's effort to include detailed event planning related contents. Therefore, it is suggested that the website template provided by BIRCO offer options in order to provide teams interested in targeting social and corporate events clients with the ability to have a dedicated event-related tab structure while also maintaining the uniform appearance of all minor league baseball team websites. For example, a link to a stand-alone event planning website managed by the team desiring such a platform can be developed within the standard minor league team website structure. Teams interested in targeting prospective social and corporate event clients could then provide their own rich contents across all three events and meetings management perspectives without being bound to the standard MiLB BIRCO template.



The frequency analysis of the types of events that can be hosted at the minor league stadiums provide insights on the positioning of minor league stadiums as a social/corporate event venue. Consistent with the findings of Lee et al. (2012), whom investigated major outdoor sports stadiums (NFL, MLB, and MLS), the results show that minor league stadiums are capable of hosting various types of events including birthday parties, business/corporate/private meetings, business/corporate/social outings, wedding functions, conventions/trade shows/job fairs, company recreational events, concerts/music shows, and holiday parties. While minor league stadiums are not event-purposed venues, they do market themselves as an alternative unique venue for many types of social/corporate events.

The findings from the analysis of available event management-related features and services at minor league stadiums show these venues are well equipped to host social and corporate events. These available features and services include many of the key site selection features and services that are valued by event/meeting planners. They include: on-site catering service, audio/visual infrastructure, dedicated event/meeting space, on-site event staff, internet (Wi-Fi), and abundant on-site parking. It is critical that sport stadiums actively market their capacity alongside these features and services as this criteria item is often a key determinant of event/meeting planners' site selection decision. Based on the mBSC analysis, 45% of team websites failed to provide this information.

Finally, it is important to note that minor league baseball teams also market their unique features and services that are only available at sport stadiums, such as video scoreboard display (Jumbotron) and exclusive access to the field for a variety of activities (e.g., batting practice, company softball game, etc.). While minor league stadiums may not be able to compete item by item against meeting/event purpose-built venues (e.g. conference center, convention center, convention hotel), they do offer unique features that differentiate them in the marketplace. Therefore, these particular features and services should be highlighted within the overall marketing mix alongside the key site selection features and services prospective corporate and social event clients demand.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

For future studies, the number of events hosted at a sports stadium may be used as a dependent variable to test the effectiveness of team websites as an eMarketing tool on a case-by-case basis. While actual (net) revenue generated from hosting corporate and social events may also be used as a dependent variable, this data is likely kept confidential and is therefore less accessible to researchers.

In addition, many stadiums and sports teams partner with a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), also known as a Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). DMOs and CVBs promote the development and marketing of a destination, focusing on convention sales and services as an official point of contact for convention, business and leisure travelers. DMOs and CVBs also assist event/

meeting planners with preparation and encourage business travelers and visitors to visit local attractions (DMAI, 2013). Therefore, an analysis of stadium information on DMO/CVB websites may provide another facet of stadium eMarketing efforts.

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