

The Four Rules of Sports Messaging

The companion guide to Episode 179 of the Sports Marketing Machine Podcast.

Keep this one on the desk. Run every email, landing page, promotion, ticket offer, and group pitch through it before it goes live — then use the worksheet at the back to rewrite one offer this week.

Sports teams don't have a product problem. They have a messaging problem.

Most teams know what they're selling. Tickets. Promotions. Theme nights. Group experiences. Season plans.

But fans don't think in those categories.

They think about Friday night. Getting the kids out of the house. What to do for the company picnic. Their kid's birthday, entertaining a client, time with the grandkids, doing something with friends.

Good sports marketing isn't just about making your message clear. It's about translating what the team sells into why someone would actually want it.

THE FOUR RULES

- 01 Write for the first-timer
- 02 Sell what they're already trying to do
- 03 Make it repeatable
- 04 You're not what they came for

RULE 01

Write for the First-Timer

Clarity is measured by the person who has never been.

Your season ticket holder already understands you. They know where to park. They know what a flex plan is. They know where Section 104 is.

The first-timer doesn't. And the first-timer is where your growth comes from.

The biggest mistake isn't jargon. It's inside language disguised as normal language.

Flex Plan. Membership. Group Experience. Hospitality. Every one of those makes perfect sense inside the front office. But would someone who has never attended know exactly what they're getting?

This isn't an argument for renaming what works. If a promo has real equity with your fans, keep the name — just add the line that tells a stranger what actually happens that night.

Instead of	Try
5-Game Flex Plan	Pick any 5 games. Can't make one? Swap it for another.
2026 Memberships Available Now	Your seat. Every home game.
Thirsty Thursday	Thirsty Thursday — \$2 drafts all game, every Thursday.
Premium Hospitality	A private space, food included, nobody has to host.

Don't make people learn your language before they can buy from you.

THE TEST

Give your message to someone who has never attended a game. Ask them: "What do you think I'm selling?" If they can't tell you immediately, rewrite it.

RULE 02

Sell What They're Already Trying to Do

Nobody wakes up wanting a "group outing."

That's what the ticket office calls it. Your buyer calls it something else.

- An HR director needs to plan the company picnic.
- A sales manager needs somewhere to take clients.
- A youth coach wants an end-of-season activity.
- A parent needs something to do with the kids Friday night.
- A grandparent wants an excuse to spend time with the grandkids.

The transaction might be identical. The reason for buying it isn't.

Your marketing shouldn't begin with your inventory. It should begin with what your customer was already trying to accomplish before your team entered the picture.

Instead of	Try
Book a Group Outing for 20+	Company picnic coming up? We can make this easy.
Youth Sports Group Tickets	Give the team one more night together after the season ends.
Premium Hospitality Packages	Take your best clients somewhere they'll actually remember.

THIS IS BIGGER THAN KNOWING YOUR PERSONA

The same person has different reasons to buy across a season.

- April — We need to get the kids out of the house.
- June — I need somewhere to have my kid's birthday.
- August — Let's do one more thing before school starts.

Same person. Different job. Different message.

That's potentially three sales, not one. If she came in April because the kids were bored, you don't have to convince her in June that the kids are bored again.

You don't need three different customers. You need the three different reasons the same customer might come.

THE TEST

Look at every ticket product you sell and ask: "What was this person already trying to do before they thought about us?" Sell that.

RULE 03

Make It Repeatable

Your fans have to be able to sell it for you.

There's a difference between a message that's easy to understand and one that's easy to repeat. Sports needs both — because sports buyers recruit other buyers.

- The HR director has to convince 40 coworkers.
- The youth coach has to get 15 parents on board.
- The season ticket holder invites their neighbor.
- The parent texts another family: "You guys want to go with us Friday?"

Your marketing has to survive that handoff. If it takes three paragraphs to explain why someone should come, your customer isn't going to repeat three paragraphs.

Give them one sentence worth repeating.

Instead of	Try
Affordable family entertainment with exciting promotions throughout the season.	Twelve bucks. Two hours. The kids run the bases afterward.
Customizable group experiences for organizations of all sizes.	You bring the people. We handle the rest.
Postgame entertainment following select games.	Stay after. They'll talk about it all week.

THIS IS NOT THE SAME AS REMOVING FRICTION

Friction asks: Can they buy it?

Repeatability asks: Can they sell it for you?

In sports, your customers are some of your most important salespeople.

THE HANDOFF TEST

Tell somebody your offer once. An hour later, ask them to explain it to somebody else. Don't correct them — just listen. Whatever survived is your message.

RULE 04

You're Not What They Came For

Most people didn't come because of you.

This might be the hardest rule for sports organizations to accept.

Some did come for you. Your die-hard fans care deeply about the roster. They know the prospects. They know the standings. They know who's starting tonight.

But look around the building. There's a dad spending Friday night with his daughter. A company celebrating its employees. A Little League team running around the concourse. Two friends having a beer. A grandmother taking her grandkids somewhere they'll remember.

They didn't buy baseball. They bought what the game allowed them to experience.

And yet teams spend an enormous amount of their marketing talking about themselves. Our roster. Our history. Our affiliation. Our players. Our accomplishments. Our game.

THE REFRAME

The problem isn't that teams talk about themselves too much. It's that they advertise the one thing most of their fans didn't buy.

Your job isn't to be the hero of the story. Your job is to stage the story the fan gets to tell afterward.

- Make the decision easy.
- Make the purchase easy.
- Make the night easy.
- Then create the moment worth remembering.

Because players leave. Rosters turn over. Prospects get promoted. Seasons end.

Memories don't.

Nobody tells their coworkers about the shortstop.

They tell them their kid caught a foul ball.

Nobody remembers what your record was on July 17th. They remember Dad taking them to games every summer. They remember the company picnic. They remember fireworks with their kids. They remember the night their daughter got an autograph.

That's the product.

Instead of	Try
Come see our All-Star shortstop.	Bring the kids Friday. Stay after and run the bases.
Proud affiliate of the [MLB Club].	The Friday night your kids ask to do again.
Groups of 20 or more receive special benefits.	The company outing nobody complains about.

The first version in each of those starts with us — our player, our affiliation, our ticket product. The second starts with them. Their problem. The experience they want.

THE TEST

Take your last ten marketing messages. For each one, ask: Who is the main character? If the answer is your team nine times out of ten, there's your problem.

Run It Through Four Questions

Before your next email, landing page, promotion, ticket offer, or group sales campaign goes live:

1. **Would a first-timer understand it?**
2. **Does it speak to what they're already trying to do?**
3. **Could they repeat it to someone else?**
4. **Is the fan the main character — or are we?**

If you can answer those four questions correctly, your marketing starts sounding a lot less like a ticket office — and a lot more like the people you're trying to reach.

Rewrite One Offer

Pick a single offer you're selling right now. Work it through all four rules.

The offer, exactly as it's written today:

01 What would a first-timer not understand about it?

02 What was this buyer already trying to do before they thought about us?

03 The one sentence they could repeat to someone else:

04 Who is the main character in the version above?

Rewrite it here:

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Rules 1 and 3 adapt StoryBrand's 4 Rules of Messaging to a sports context. Rules 2 and 4 depart from it.