

## Microsoft Business Solutions CRM Helps the Seattle SuperSonics Score with Fans

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*To compete effectively in a jam-packed sports and entertainment environment, the NBA's Seattle SuperSonics sought a customer relationship management solution that could help the team leverage the power of their brand, put people in the seats, and ensure a positive experience that keeps fans coming back. The team found that solution in Microsoft CRM.*

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### Situation

When the Seattle SuperSonics take on their regional rivals, the Portland Trailblazers, the competition is always intense. But the on-court action pales in comparison to another battle the team wages every day: the fight for fans' entertainment dollars.

With four professional sports teams and a plethora of college ones, competition for the attention of Seattle's sports fans is keen. As a result, the level of customer service the SuperSonics provide their fans is every bit as important as a winning record.

The trouble was, the team's systems weren't up to the task. Data about sponsors, ticket holders, and prospective ticket buyers was scattered among various databases and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets within the organization, making information-sharing difficult. Even such seemingly straightforward tasks as getting a ticketholder's name removed from a mailing list required far too much time and effort, says Rick Shrum, the team's Director of Information Technology. "We've always been very customer-centric," Shrum says, "but we knew we needed to take things to another level."

### Solution

At various times, the team considered implementing a CRM solution to manage data about their fans—whom they refer to as "guests"—even trying a handful of packages. "All the different CRM vendors had been in here at one time or another," Shrum says.

Recently, the Sonics felt they were ready for CRM and sought a solution that could, among other things, help give their guests a positive experience, boost fan loyalty, and generate additional ticket sales. The new solution had to be flexible, have a low cost of ownership, and be able to integrate with other applications the teams run.

Microsoft CRM fit the bill, and the team agreed to beta-test the solution. For Shrum, the decision to go with Microsoft CRM was an easy one, especially in light of his commitment to Microsoft technologies. "I was part of the Microsoft .NET early adopter program," he explains. "I'm very familiar with .NET, and I've been really impressed with the platform and technology." In addition, he says, "We liked the ability to take advantage of the .NET interfaces and functionality to make it flexible and changeable. The price point was very attractive, especially compared to some of the other solutions



### Solution Overview

#### Customer Profile

The National Basketball Association's Seattle SuperSonics were founded in 1966 and began play the following year. The team—along with the WNBA's Seattle Storm—is owned by The Basketball Club of Seattle LLC. Together, the clubs have approximately 140 employees.

#### Business Situation

The Seattle SuperSonics sought a CRM solution that could help the club provide fans with a positive entertainment experience, increase fan loyalty, continue to build a powerful brand, and provide uniformly high levels of customer service.

#### Solution

Microsoft CRM provides the Sonics with powerful information the club can use to provide a positive experience for fans, boost loyalty, and generate additional revenue and ticket sales.

#### Benefits

- Information that helps lead to a consistent fan experience
- Effective information-sharing between departments
- Better understanding of fan buying behavior

#### Software and Services

Microsoft® Business Solutions CRM  
Microsoft® Business Solutions—Great Plains  
Microsoft SQL Server  
Microsoft Exchange Server  
Microsoft BizTalk Server  
Microsoft Windows®  
Microsoft Outlook  
Microsoft Office

#### Partner

Equarius, Inc.  
Bellevue, Washington, USA

we looked at. And Microsoft CRM was a great way to leverage our investment in other Microsoft technologies, like Great Plains, Outlook, and Exchange.”

## **Benefits**

Of the approximately 140 employees who work for the Seattle Sonics and Storm, about 20 currently use Microsoft CRM, a number Shrum expects to grow to 50. Nevertheless, the organization is already realizing many benefits from the solution, including...

### **Understanding fans' buying behavior**

Microsoft CRM is particularly valuable when the Sonics conduct their annual season ticket holder renewal campaign. “Season ticket holders are the trunk of the financial tree for this or for any professional sports organization,” explains Pete Winemiller, the team’s Senior Director of Guest Relations and Premium Seating Services. After each season, the team mails out an invitation to purchase season tickets for the upcoming season. “Microsoft CRM allows us to track guests’ responses and gives us a more reliable way to access and share that information,” Winemiller says. “With Microsoft CRM, we have a better understanding of what our guests are thinking, feeling, and saying.”

### **Ensuring consistency of experience**

By using Microsoft CRM’s knowledge base features, the SuperSonics are able to ensure their guests receive a consistently enjoyable time. “It’s very important for us to set a precedent and be consistent with our guests,” Shrum explains. “So, if two fans collide and spill their food on each other, we’ll know how we handled that situation in the past and how we should handle it in the future. That type of information is very powerful, but was never really centrally tracked before.”

### **Improving communication between departments**

Microsoft CRM helps the team’s office employees stay more informed about customer accounts. “Microsoft CRM is a great communication tool between departments,” Shrum says. “With it, communication can now occur right in the system. Before, that would have been an e-mail exchange.”

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For more information about the Seattle SuperSonics, visit the team’s Web site at:  
<http://www.seattlesupersonics.com>.

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**Rick Shrum**  
Director of Information Technology  
Seattle SuperSonics