

***Recovery Marketing for College Sports Programs:
Restoring the Image of Intercollegiate Athletics after Negative Scenarios***

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Recovery marketing can be defined as the actual or possible regaining, restoration, or improvement of something lost or taken away as a result of a significantly negative situation or event through the transfer of goods and services from producers to consumers (Schwarz, 2010). For sport marketing, Burton and Howard (2000) stated “the concept of recovery entails returning a disaffected customer to satisfaction after a service breakdown – one that is often unexpected and unscripted”, with a broad focus on strikes, lockouts, illegal activities, poor performance, and misunderstood intentions that jeopardize brand equity.

With a foundation in the hospitality, travel, and tourism industries, significantly negative situations have been traditionally defined as natural disasters, government and politically-motivated crises, and health related crises. For the sport industry, and more specifically in college sports, there are other negative scenarios that may require the implementation of a recovery sport marketing plan. Some examples include some of the traditional scenarios (natural disasters), but are extended to rules violations (NCAA sanctions); criminal acts by players and coaches (gambling/point-shaving; illicit and performance-enhancing drug use; intentional torts); elimination of major and minor sports (budgets; Title IX), and downward NCAA reclassification (Division I → Division II; Division II → Division III).

Much of the previous work on recovery marketing has focused on crisis management, and market recovery and communications – specifically as related to communication during tourism crises, evaluating strategies for market recovery, and comprehending these issues from the viewpoint of the destination management organization (Carlson & Liburd, 2007). In the realm of sport marketing, the research by Burton and Howard (2000) concluded that “(1) those employed in sport marketing must be prepared for unexpected, often negative actions that jeopardize a sport organization’s brand equity; (2) the negative actions tend to inflame public opinion or alter fan perceptions; and (3) these events tend to create an immediate economic reaction that can distract senior management and impede organizational performance.”

The content of this presentation will be threefold. First will an elaboration about the negative scenarios described above with specific examples that have occurred over the past decade. Second will be to expand on the concept of recovery marketing in terms of intercollegiate athletics programs, and how recovery sport marketing can be utilized to restore image after perceived negative scenarios. Finally, suggestions will be provided to help intercollegiate athletics administrators in the creation of a recovery marketing plan for their college sports program.