

## Sports Geek Nation AMA with Steve DeLay

Steve DeLay has an impressive track record of increasing revenues for more than 300 teams and colleges that he currently works with in the areas of ticketing and sponsorship. He is currently the owner of the Macon Bacon baseball team and co-authored The Ultimate Toolkit and Group Sales Superstar training programs with Jon Spoelstra. He has been personally involved in more than 1,200 sports sellouts to date.

Steve was a Sports Geek guest back in episode 210 where he shares his his experience in sales & ticketing and how to fill every seat in the stadium.

Connect with Steve DeLay on Twitter [@SteveDeLay2](#), [LinkedIn](#) and Slack [@Steve DeLay](#) Find out more about The Ultimate Toolkit at [theultimate toolkit.com](https://theultimate toolkit.com) and Macon Bacon at [maconbaconbaseball.com](https://maconbaconbaseball.com)

Here's the full transcript:

Links to names will link you into Slack community, if you are not a member [please sign up here](#).

**Q. [seancallanan](#):** I know we covered this in our Sports Geek podcast chat but what is your goto advice when a team wants to fill a stadium?

**A. [Steve DeLay](#):** I tell teams to focus on sellouts. Fans have more fun at sold out games and are more likely to want to come back. Any good ticket sales strategy starts with a plan for selling out specific games.

**Q. [Michael Brinkman](#):** what advice do you have for leagues and teams that feel like technology advancements with TV's, mobile devices and various platforms have made it more of a challenge to get fans off the couch and into arenas and stadiums?

**[jase](#):** one way to improve the game day experience (and create more sponsor adventures inventory) is to deliver the behind the scenes, halftime and interview content fans are used to from broadcast direct to the phones of fans in the stadium. You can also push ticket offers to future games to fans while at the stadium - works great after a win! I have a system to do that if you'd like to test it Michael

**A. [Steve DeLay](#):** focus on the experience at the game. If you drive sellouts, being at a sold out sporting event is no comparison to sitting on your couch watching the game. On the flip side, if you try to sell 50-60% of your tickets for every game, it's a poor experience and fans will be more inclined to stay home.

**Q. [thebennewton](#):** hi Steve, what % of your ticket sales come via group ticket sales?

**A. [Steve DeLay](#):** most of our advertising for ticket packages and single games sales now surrounds social and digital advertising. However, group sales is a huge driver of volume of sales. A team that's strong in group sales could do 50% of their sales in group tickets. The

challenge is group sales takes manpower to do. Group ticket sales don't come via social media or over the internet. A salesperson has to make calls.

The salesperson also has to be well-trained to be successful. They can't just 'wing it'.

**thebennewton:** Thanks Steve. I've been told by some who have tried selling group tickets to the Australian baseball league that it just doesn't work in Australia. Does the Macon bacon (or previously Dayton) do anything more than calls to build relationship with community groups? Do they give back, outside of the game?

**Steve DeLay:** giving groups the ability to raise money while selling your tickets is a tremendous asset for sales. Our team in Macon helped non-profit organizations raise \$40,000 through the sale of our tickets where a portion went back to the non-profit.

**thebennewton:** that's a big plus for any non-profit. I noticed that MLB teams like the Dodgers do some themed nights such as Faith & Family Night, and many MiLB teams do scout sleepover nights. Are these good ways to focus those particular groups into purchasing into those particular games?

**Steve DeLay:** very much so. Groups are just looking for a night out. They may not even be a fan of the team or sport. Theme nights give them that much more reason to go to a game.

**Q. thebennewton:** how do you focus your marketing and game day experience to be so family friendly? Are kids sitting in their seats the whole time or are there areas for them to wander about?

**A. Steve DeLay:** our ballparks have a Kids Zone for them to play in. We also have a mascot that wanders around in the crowd. We focus heavily on the between innings entertainment so kids aren't bored by the down time.

**thebennewton:** Thanks Steve. Sorry to hog all the questions here, I just think that what you guys are achieving is fantastic.

One last one before I head into a meeting - what % of your ticket sales occur ahead of the ballgame compared to those sold at the gate?

**Steve DeLay:** for our biggest games, 100% occur before the game. Our goal is to sell the game out in advance so we don't even have fans walking up to buy tickets. In fact, it's a nice problem to turn fans away at the box office and tell them, "I'm sorry, the game is sold out."

**thebennewton:** Thanks Steve.

**Q. Michael Brinkman:** For the teams that you work with, how important has a defined structure of individual roles within the ticket sales or sponsorship department been? Along with that, what should teams/venues expect as good return out of what they invest into a sales rep?

**A. Steve DeLay:** Most teams have their salespeople do a little bit of everything. That usually means they do nothing really well. I recommend dividing salespeople up by prospect,

not product i.e., a few salespeople focus 100% of their time on businesses, a few on 'community-style' groups like churches, schools, nonprofits and youth sports teams and a third group focus on the fans of the team. I call them "Joe Fan".

**Q. thebennewton:** do your group sales teams ever focus on adult groups? Or is it generally ones where kids are involved?

**A. Steve DeLay:** We focus on all sorts. Company outings, adult sports groups, teams etc. Anyone who can bring 15+ people can be a group.

**Q. thebennewton:** with the rebrand and first season of the Macon Bacon, did your marketing budget include offline marketing such as billboards, radio ads etc for brand awareness or did you still focus on digital and social first of all? did you have marketing that focused on the brand or is it primarily focused on sales?

**A. Steve DeLay:** We didn't spend a nickel on regular mass media advertising. Every \$ spent was on FB ads and digital retargeting. We spent \$3,300 on ads and generated \$115,000 in sales.

**thebennewton:** Guessing you also relied on earned media from launch? Is that a big reason why the name Bacon was chosen? After reading 'find your yellow tux' i noted that it was a big reason for the Bananas, on top of the other ways that it fit in with their fun brand

**Steve DeLay:** Yes, we very much did. We wanted to create conversations around the community and the name, our ticket packages and the improvements to the stadium would do that.

**Q. jolieggee:** what are you plans/focus for Macon Bacon in 2019?

**A. Steve DeLay:** We are targeting a 50% increase in group sales and a 50% increase in smaller ticket packages which we hope leads to going from 11 sellouts in 22 games to 18 sellouts in 25 games. Continued involvement in the community is crucial for us as our staff members continue to learn and grow and get better.

**Q. Johannes Wohler:** how many people do group sales and are they full time employees?

**A. Steve DeLay:** We have two full time group salespeople for our team who do nothing other than focus on schools, churches, nonprofits and other 'community-style' groups. We also have three other ticket sales people who as part of their sales responsibilities sell group tickets to businesses or individuals.

**Johannes Wohler:** Oh yes, I remember from the podcast now. You have salespeople who handle one type of customer (business, group or Joe fan), not one type of tickets.

## What is Sports Geek Nation?

Been forwarded this from a colleague? That's great we love seeing our members get credit for sharing their knowledge. Sports Geek Nation is a curated sports business community in Slack and Facebook which will help you learn from the very best in the world. Sports Geek Nation was founded by Sean Callanan in 2015 (as #SportsBiz Slack), it connects sports executives who work in digital, data and technology.

Sports Geek Nation has members from (in alphabetical order) Australia, Canada, Denmark, India, Lithuania, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States working in sports such as basketball, football, ice hockey, baseball, AFL, horse racing, golf, rugby league, netball and more.

You can join Sports Geek Nation by going to [SportsGeekNation.com](https://SportsGeekNation.com)