

ZOOM WEBINAR
Executive Summary | May 28, 2020

Getting Back in the Game: Design's Role in Bringing Fans Back to Venues

The last few months have provided our entire world with a new appreciation for live community events. These events — and the memories created from experiencing them — give shape and identity to individuals and the communities we call home. Before spectator sports and entertainment events can resume, fans need to feel safe leaving their homes and going to venues that put them back in contact with others. How can we design or modify our facilities and venues to restore confidence and create these experiences in the evolving environment?

Kansas City is home to some of the world's largest and most respected architecture, engineering and construction firms. In the May 28, 2020 webinar, panelists shared thoughts and expertise on the current situation which requires investigation, creativity and teamwork. More than 350 people participated online worldwide.

The discussion informed ideas on how to accelerate, innovate and define the “new normal” when it comes to fan experience. A Q&A session followed. Summary below:

- **CASE STUDY: BIG 12 BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT**
 - On Friday, March 13, 2020, a national emergency was declared due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 in the United States. That same day, the Big 12 Conference had to make a very difficult decision.
 - In the days leading into Big 12 championship basketball tournament, instead of typical planning, conversations had turned to whether the tournament should be played at all. Should fans be allowed to attend?
 - The tournament proceeded with two games with fans on Wednesday, then the remainder of the tournament was cancelled.
 - Cancelling the tournament was a heavy feeling. It negated the excitement that goes along with a major sports event, plus there was a \$20 million economic fallout for the region.
 - Even though it meant breaking hearts of student athletes, looking back, we know we made the right call.
- **ORGANIZING EVENTS**

- We all miss sports and the events in our communities. Organizers need to determine the right time to bring them back, keeping in compliance with city and state guidelines. Also keep in mind that leagues and venues may have their own guidelines. What this means for organizers is putting into place massive plans that we never had to do before. We're working three or four times harder now to put events in place.
 - We are trying to figure out what's safe. We're asking questions like "can we go virtual or should we cancel events completely?"
- **RE-ENTRY**
 - Conversations started with clients on how to safely do business as usual. But this quickly changed since timelines or regulations that will be in place are unknown. Also, we don't know how individual teams want to approach re-entry.
 - Eventually, buildings will re-open and sports will commence. But, in the meantime, we are planning on three phases of re-entry:
 - **Phase 1** will be live events, featuring virtual fans or no fans – the teams and coaches are back together, but there are minimal operations for the building.
 - Discussions taking place on what can be done with the empty bowl; technological solutions to enhance the viewing experience.
 - **Phase 2** will be partial attendance – events conducted with limited fans in attendance. This phase brings more complexities into play. There has been much discussion around technology and food/beverage solutions.
 - **Phase 3** will be full fan attendance – Venues need to determine which temporary measures become permanent policies when full attendance resumes.
 - In addition to the actual venue, there have been discussions on unique ways the city or neighborhood can become a concourse. What does experience look like if connections to an event can be made with restaurants, retail popups, tailgates at the home, etc.?
- **MOVING INSIDE THE VENUE**
 - The A/E/C industry is consulting with clients on what it will look like when fans trickle back in during phase 2.
 - Whether in an arena or outdoor stadium, the plans for re-entry focus on basic parameters of density, flow rate, cleanliness and controlling movement; all while offering some freedom of choice.
 - All-venue circulation means fans move through venue freely (as they did previous to COVID-19). But, a "neighborhood approach" could allow better control of a venue while providing flexibility and scalability. It's a way to trickle back to full capacity.
 - Quadrant analysis shows a great deal of crossing paths inside the venue, even for small groups. We are recommending quadrants be looked at individually. Not all measures apply to all quadrants.
 - As an example, when it comes to density, flow rate, cleanliness and controlling movement, we ask "Can in-seat technology options minimize fan movement for food and beverage?"
 - Technology brings owners and teams additional flexibility in planning for re-entry.
 - Not one size fits all, depending on regulations and guidelines. The solutions will differ by venue.

- **NEW FRONTIER FOR A/E/C INDUSTRY**

- When a city or venue is hosting championship events, the organizers like to guarantee a sellout. Now, instead of a sellout, we're just focusing on getting fans to attend. How many can we get into the building and help them feel safe, even when cheering and yelling?
- Designers use graphics to visualize what it might look like when fans return in different densities and seating configurations. In a general example, there is a significant difference in density if clustering fans in groups of two (12% capacity), groups of four (19% capacity), and groups of six (19-22% capacity).
- Seating scenarios are being tested across multiple venues to achieve the highest density possible. We recommend it be studied graphically to envision an entire venue.
- It's not just planning for seating. The density planning needs to apply to concourses as well.

- **BUILDING SYSTEMS**

- We are asking "can technology help solve virus transmission issues in concourses?" For example, can fans use cell phones to check on the restroom queues?
- For food, can venues use technology for mobile pickup? This allows fans to pick up pre-boxed orders and go to their seats.
- Taking a step back, the planning for building systems starts with virus transmission vectors. Fortunately, the three vectors have potential technological solutions:
 - **Surface transmission** -- Venues are considering touchless fixtures in restrooms. Unfortunately, areas such as doors and elevators are harder to control, so we still need to encourage good hygiene.
 - **Droplet** – These are the result of proximity of people. Social distancing is key. For venues, there is a difference between planning for inside vs. outside: indoors has restricted air movement, while that's not an issue for outdoor gatherings.
 - **Airborne transmission** – This is the spreading of the virus throughout space. To best control airborne transmission, venues need temperature and humidity control. If possible, venues can turn on 100% outside air to circulate. There are energy consequences to consider, but perhaps use 100% outside air during a limited timeframe. HEPA filtering and UV light in the return side of air handling units can render virus neutral.
- 4 takeaways: Use technology as best you can (which also helps during regular cold and flu season) ... social distancing is important while wearing masks ... wash hands ... don't touch your face.
- Technology isn't a silver bullet, but it offers ways to help.

- **BUSINESS OF SPORTS**

- When it comes to sports, sooner or later the topic turns to money. For some venues, the question isn't if you can make investments in the technology and other options, but should you make them? When we're talking about only 20% capacity, crowd sizes obviously are much reduced. Does it make economic sense to put improvements and processes in place when only 20% capacity can be used?
- One example to consider is minor league baseball. They generally have no television revenue, so selling seats is more important. Will the pandemic change the landscape?

- Another example is the NCAA. What will be the effect on the weaker teams? Will there be further separations between the haves and the have nots? Since there already existed a gap, will the pandemic accelerate the gap and affect league structures?
 - Football is financial lifeblood of many schools. Football season funds many other sports. If there's no football, will there be athletic departments that don't make it?
 - All these questions need to be considered before taking on technology solutions.
- **BRINGING FANS BACK TO GAMES**
 - The effect of the pandemic on sports is drastic. What's the new normal? At this point, we have to be OK with competitive equity being different than it was before.
 - Design professionals in Kansas City and across the country are working with clients and exploring options. For more than 50 years, starting with development of the Truman Sports Complex, Kansas City has been the capital of sports design. Our city redefined the industry. Solutions will be created in KC.
- **QUESTIONS & ANSWER SESSION TOPICS:**

HUMAN BEHAVIOR -- *Once fans come back into venues, what will their behavior be? Will they be OK with wearing masks? Are rowdy fans going to follow arrows?*

 - As designers, we can help mitigate risks, but venues can only do so much, then it's up to the fan. This question addresses the many scenarios we're going through.
 - Protocols can create sense of safety. Also, factor in that those coming into facility assume some risk on being around other people. Temperature checking or touchless technology make sense. One-way concourses become more difficult to manage. We are weighing pros or cons with clients. Each instance is different.
 - We want scalable control that allows freedom of movement and freedom of choice. We're recommending neighborhood circulation with different entrances to allow social distancing.

MANAGING COSTS -- *With the required new measures and new expenses, how do you anticipate costs will be managed? Will the cost of a ticket rise?*

 - With clients, we are going through series of questions. Each venue is different. Something might work for collegiate, but not professional teams. At this point, the revenue models are ongoing and there's no magic bullet.
 - Technology is at forefront for venues looking to upgrade. This might mean they are speeding up planned upgrades that have already been budgeted.
 - We haven't heard a client say they are raising ticket prices. However, with a 30-45% increase in expense, at a much-reduced capacity, they must look to reduce costs overall.
 - There's a heightened awareness of designing venues that can be active 365 days a year, not just sports-specific. Venues need to capitalize on added revenue opportunities. They may be diversifying revenue streams to include things such as adjacent mixed-use development.

Facilitators:

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Panel:

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Sponsor:

- **KC Global Design** -- A collaboration of leading architecture, engineering, construction, design, and technology companies located in the greater Kansas City region that impact communities both here and around the world. KC Global Design exists to elevate KC as the premier design community through our collective efforts and expertise.

For more information about the session or to continue the discussion, contact Meryl Dillman, Project Manager, KC Rising, at mdillman@kcciviccouncil.org. Or, visit kcglobaldesign.com.