

The cashless sports venue – an American first – comes alive at Wichita's Lawrence-Dumont Stadium

On May 7, 2008, the Wichita Wingnuts of the American Association of Professional Baseball opened their 2008 season completely cashless. Oddly enough, in this case, being cashless is proving a real boost to the bottom line.

You see, back in May, Lawrence-Dumont Stadium, the Wingnuts home ballpark, became the nation's first true cashless professional sports venue.

"We've created a new, exciting fan experience at Wingnuts games," says Josh Robertson, the team's general manager. "Our fans benefit from the speed and convenience of using either Wingnuts' cards or credit cards to purchase concession items. And our sponsors benefit from the increased exposure generated by the collectible Wingnuts card series."

Total Venue Control LLC (TVC), a Chicago-based marketing and operations company, implemented the cashless payment system, including all point-of-sale equipment, card design and production, card sales staff and cash handling services. Also, TVC (www.totalvenuecontrol.com) brought together the key players – Game Time Food & Beverage Services, Ltd., EZ Pay Inc., and Renaissance Network Solutions – to create this historic scenario in Wichita.

"Our turnkey solution increases concession and sponsorship revenues, decreases operating expenses, effectively eliminates cash-for-product theft and enhances each fan's event experience," says Cameron Wall, TVC's chief executive officer. "Children love the collectible card series. And for corporate customers, the cards add a 'country club' atmosphere to client entertainment."

According to Wall, cashless venues decrease time lost in crowded concession lines by as much as 30 percent, providing fans much more time to enjoy the event with their families, friends and clients. Additional fan benefits include product and service discounts at concession card sponsor stores in the greater Wichita community. Sponsorship includes corporate logos printed on the Wingnuts' custom-designed concession cards, and an activation program designed to increase fan awareness of sponsors' involvement with the team and to drive fans to sponsor stores.

Game Time Food & Beverage Services (www.gametimefbs.com), the Wingnuts concessionaire, also is excited about the new cashless payment system. According to Brian Klassman, Game Time's president, per capita spending has been over 30 percent higher than if Game Time had accepted cash alone. By utilizing only plastic cards, the average transaction is faster and larger, increasing concession sales revenues.

Klassman added that the elimination of cash handling at concession stands decreases the time and expense related to counting and reconciling cash as well as the exposure to error and cash-for-product theft.

"Theft can account for as much as three

percent of yearly sales," adds Bill Rayner, a 30-year concessions veteran executive and president at TVC.

Wingnuts' concession cards feature the team's players, mascots and stadium and are available in denominations ranging from \$5 to \$100. The cards have magnetic stripes on the card backs similar to those found on credit, debit and gift cards and can be purchased in advance with season tickets, at the box office and on the Wingnuts' Web site (www.wichitawingnuts.com).



At the event, cards can be purchased with cash or by credit/debit cards from a dedicated card sales staff.

Unspent card balances can be refunded onsite, at the box office or by mail. There is no cost to the fans.

As noted, Total Venue Control brought together several specialized technology companies to provide this unique and cutting-edge concession payment system. In the first three weeks of operation alone, more than 42,000 Wingnuts' concession card transactions were processed.

Most of those transactions reached their destination via Wi-Fi, or wireless, technology, provided by Renaissance Network Solutions Inc. (www.rnetworksolutions.com), based in Atlanta. According to John Mahon, Renaissance's CEO, the Wingnuts ballpark project is really a terrific example of how wireless technology can facilitate a heightened fan experience.

"Fans love the fact that they can leave their cash home," Mahon says. "This is really where venue cash management is going, and Wichita is a great example for other stadiums and arenas who might be looking at this type of solution."



You'll find fans and fun at Wichita Wingnuts' games, but you won't find any cash. The Wingnuts' ballpark, Lawrence-Dumont Stadium, is America's first completely cashless professional sports venue.

To process all major credit card purchases, TVC works with EZ Pay Inc., also based in Atlanta. EZ Pay (www.ezpayinc.com), the country's fourth largest credit card processor, handles all Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover charges for the venue, including acquiring the charges, getting approvals and moving the funds to the bank (in this case, the First National Bank of Omaha). "We like a challenge because innovation is a critical part of our business model," says Bobby Williams, EZ Pay's CEO. "Plus, I'm a sports fan and to me, this is an idea whose time has come for American sports."

Cashless venues have experienced increasing popularity in Europe over the past 10 years. Amsterdam Arena, a 52,000-seat domed stadium, has been using cashless smart card payment technologies since the late 1990s.

"The dramatic increase in the popularity of gift cards and debit cards as well as MasterCard and Visa's marketing campaigns ["leave your cash at home"] have influenced the ongoing U.S. transition to a cashless society," Wall says. "Limited access to ATM machines at entertainment events and limited or no use of credit/debit cards at most POS are leading to increased customer service problems."

Five years ago, cashless smart card-based events in the U.S. were improbable. Now they are inevitable, Wall adds. In fact, he notes, in Malcolm Gladwell's recent bestseller, "The

Tipping Point," the author explores how society's behavior can change dramatically in a short period of time from a variety of disparate and subtle influences.

"Gladwell defines these social upheavals as 'tipping points,'" Wall says. "In one cited

example, mobile phones went from luxury to necessity in the U.S. in 1998, even though they had seen widespread use in Europe years earlier."

Cashless payment systems, Wall believes, have reached a similar tipping point. Originally, Lawrence-Dumont stadium had a single ATM machine outside the front gate, and credit card use at concession points was not planned. But Total Venue Control's cashless payment system has dramatically altered this scenario.

"This was one significant benefit the Wingnuts wanted for their fans," Wall says. "And it's proving to be a real success."

Today, fans can use credit/debit cards at all permanent concession stands, which includes 19 points-of-sale. Additionally, fans can purchase Wingnuts concession cards with their credit or debit cards at three kiosks located conveniently along the single concourse. Instead of one ATM machine, Wingnuts fans can now use their credit and debit cards at 23 locations. Wingnuts cards can be used at every permanent, portable and mobile concession point.

"It all adds up to increased revenues, decreased expenses and an enhanced fan experience," Wall says. "It's really something to experience the first cashless professional sports venue in the United States. We're scheduling several events in August and September at Wingnuts games for interested teams, stadiums, arenas, festivals and other venues. And, along with our technology partners, we plan to exhibit this December in Las Vegas at both the Baseball Winter Meetings and the International Association of Fairs and Expositions Convention." **FE**

First Cashless Professional Sports Stadium in the US

Increased revenues, decreased expenses and an enhanced fan event experience created at Lawrence-Dumont Stadium, home of the Wichita Wingnuts



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