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Realtime Season Ticket Sales Avert LeBron Rush

By [Kyle Stack](#) ✉ August 9, 2010 | 2:01 pm | Categories: [Business](#), [Data](#), [Information Technology](#)



The NBA's 2010 free agent class was one of epic proportions, thanks to big-name signings from LeBron James, Chris Bosh, Amar'e Stoudemire, and others. But beyond the hundreds of millions that teams spent to improve their rosters, acquisitions like these can also ramp up customer appeal for season tickets to a fever pitch. So when the Miami Heat officially [inked](#) and unveiled the trifecta of James, Bosh, and Dwyane Wade – the summer's most-sought-after players – team officials immediately envisioned a stampede for season tickets.

Good thing the team was ready to take the wrappings off an efficient, new ticket-selling infrastructure.

[SeatPick](#), an interactive and proprietary software program developed by the Heat, allows prospective season ticket buyers the opportunity to view available seats in realtime. The culmination of years of in-house R&D and trial and error, SeatPick also offers sweeping, 3-D views from any seat location in

American Airlines Arena.

“After all the analysis, the conclusion was that folks will buy what they want on the day they want,” Heat chief information officer Tony Coba, who oversaw the SeatPick project, told Wired.com. “There was no crystal ball that gave us an edge in deciding which packages were more appealing to fans than others.”

Here’s how it works: A customer logs onto the SeatPick microsite and is brought to a page with price and quantity options, along with an arena seating map below it. Once the choices are made, a list of available seating sections meeting those requirements is highlighted in red on the map. Clicking on a section brings up a chart alongside the seating map that shows the availability of each seat in the desired section.

Green circles represent available seats. A customer can “lock” the seat for up to 10 minutes, granting them an exclusive window to purchase it. (Another user trying to buy the same seat will see it as ‘unavailable’ while the first user is in the “lock” timeframe.) While a seat is selected, the customer can also use the enhanced 3-D seat viewer, which offers a 270-degree pan of the seat’s sight-line in a minimized window.

For Heat officials, one of the system’s core efficiencies is that the user can remain on the same page while scouting ticket options. “It’s aggravating when customers get confused on the ticket purchasing process,” Coba said. “Some sites include advertising and there’s other stuff that gets in the way.”

As beneficial as the SeatPick’s realtime functionality has been, Heat officials were thankful they didn’t have to start from scratch. The SeatPick system evolved out of a method that the club’s in-house sales team had used for several years, a back-end app dubbed Smart\$ell. On-site sales reps in Miami were able to instantly pull up unused seat inventory and search for available seats as they spoke with customers.

With SeatPick, customers don’t even *have* to talk with a Heat sales person; they can buy season tickets online at 4 in the morning if they so desire. A frequent problem teams face, Coba said, is when the customer is put on hold during a call to a season ticket sales rep. The experience can ultimately be time-consuming and fruitless if the buyer doesn’t like the price and seat location options. With SeatPick, they learn their options right away.

Although the Heat wouldn’t disclose how many full season ticket plans were made available – some reports now put the waiting list at more than 6,000 – Coba said the team “broke all sorts of records selling online season tickets.” (Indeed, when the team sold out its 2010-11 allotment, the [entire sales staff was canned](#).) And while the star power of the James/Wade/Bosh triumvirate likely sold itself to fans, SeatPick helped avert any potential roadblocks in the rush to grab tickets.

In time, it could even portend a new trend in how season tickets are sold, across a spectrum of various sports. “I think you’re going to see a lot of teams try thinking out-of-the-box now as it relates to how they look at inventory,” Coba said.

Photo: Associated Press/J.Pat Carter