The Rate-Card Audit

13 checks to run before your next selling season

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You do not have a revenue problem. You have a pricing problem.

Most departments do not have a revenue problem. They have a pricing problem, and it hides in plain sight inside a rate card nobody has rebuilt in three years.

This is the review I would run before a selling season. Thirteen checks across the three places money leaks fastest: multimedia and sponsorship, premium seating and hospitality, and the digital and data rights you are currently giving away inside somebody else's package.

It takes about ninety minutes with your rate card, last year's signed agreements, and whoever actually sits in the room when a deal gets closed. Do it with them, not for them.

Score each check honestly, 0 to 2.

0 = we do not do this. 1 = we do it inconsistently or by instinct. 2 = it is documented and it holds under pressure. Twenty-six points available. The total matters less than which zeros cluster together.

Bring the last five signed agreements.

Not the rate card, the agreements. The gap between what you published and what you actually signed is the real finding, and it is almost always larger than anyone expects.

Do it before you sell, not after.

A rate card is a negotiating position. Once your first three deals of the cycle are signed at last year's numbers, you have set the market on yourself for twelve months.

Assign every zero an owner and a date.

An audit that ends in a conversation changes nothing. An audit that ends in five names next to five dates changes the next selling season.

SECTION 01 · 5 CHECKS

Multimedia & Sponsorship

The largest line, and the one most often sold on inherited assumptions. Every check here is about knowing what you own before someone else prices it for you.

01 Do you have a current, itemized inventory of every sellable asset?

Signage, radio, in-venue, social, email, coaches' shows, camps, naming, promotions, entitlements. If the list lives in a rep's head or a three-year-old deck, you are selling from memory. Rebuild it as a line-item schedule with a price on every line.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

02 Is your rate card priced against the current market or last year's card?

Pull three comparable departments in your competitive set and two non-athletics properties in your DMA. If the only input to this year's price was last year's price, the number is drift, not strategy.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

03 Do you know your realized rate versus your published rate?

Take the last five deals. Divide the total contracted value by the published value of the assets included. That percentage is your true discount rate, and it is the single most useful number in this audit.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

04 Are added-value assets tracked and priced?

The assets thrown in at the end of a negotiation are real inventory with a real cost. Track them at full value, report the total each cycle, and you will watch the giveaways shrink without a single hard conversation.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

05 Does every agreement have a defined term, escalator, and renewal window?

Flat multi-year deals with no escalator quietly lose value to inflation every season. A 3 to 5 percent annual escalator is standard, unremarkable to a partner, and compounds.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

SECTION 02 · 4 CHECKS

Premium Seating & Hospitality

The highest-margin seat in the building, and usually the one priced with the least discipline. This section is about tiers, renewals, and what the experience is actually worth.

06 Is premium priced by experience tier or by proximity alone?

Location is one input. Access, hospitality, parking, entry, and exclusivity are the others, and they are what a buyer actually describes when they tell someone why they bought.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

07 Do you know your renewal rate by tier, not just overall?

A healthy blended number routinely conceals one tier bleeding out. Segment it. The tier that is failing is a product problem, not a price problem.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

08 Is there a waitlist, and is it real?

A live waitlist is the cleanest evidence you are underpriced. If you have one and you have not moved price in two seasons, you are subsidizing your highest-willingness buyers.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

09 Are non-event revenue and rental use of premium space captured?

Corporate meetings, campus events, community rentals, and donor functions. The space is already built and staffed. Most departments never put a rate card on it at all.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

SECTION 03 · 4 CHECKS

First-Party Data & Digital Rights

The stream most often handed over for free inside a larger package, and the one with the steepest growth curve if you price it on its own.

10 Do you own and control your first-party data?

Ticketing, donor, camp, retail, email, and app data. Know where each set lives, who holds the contract with the platform, and whether you can export it tomorrow without a vendor's permission.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

11 Are digital and social assets priced separately from traditional inventory?

If digital rides along inside a signage package, it has a price of zero on your card and a price well above zero on the buyer's. Unbundle it and price it on its own reach and engagement.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

12 Do your agreements define data usage, sharing, and privacy limits?

Silence in the contract is not protection. Define what a partner may use, for how long, and what happens to the file at the end of the term, before it becomes a compliance conversation.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

13 Can you report audience reach and engagement in a form a buyer will pay against?

Impressions, verified reach, engagement, and conversion, sourced consistently and reported the same way every cycle. Measurement you can defend is what converts a digital line item from a giveaway into a rate.

☐ SCORE 0 · 1 · 2

READ YOUR SCORE

Twenty-six points. The zeros matter more than the total.

Add your thirteen scores. Then look at where the zeros cluster — three zeros in one section is a structural gap, three scattered across sections is a discipline gap, and they get fixed in completely different ways.

Score	Read	Where to start
22 - 26	**Disciplined.**	Your pricing is built on evidence. Spend this cycle on the two lowest-scoring checks and on holding rate in the room; the structure is already doing its job.
14 - 21	**Directionally right, structurally loose.**	You are pricing well in one stream and on instinct in the others. The fastest gain is usually unbundling digital and putting a tracked value on added-value assets.
7 - 13	**Inherited.**	The card is running on last year's assumptions. Rebuild the inventory schedule first — every other check depends on knowing what you actually own.
0 - 6	**Exposed.**	You are negotiating without a position. Do not open the selling season until the inventory and the realized-rate number exist; both can be built in a week.

WHAT'S NEXT

Where most departments find the money.

In practice, the first five checks account for most of what an audit recovers. Not because the rest do not matter, but because inventory and realized rate are the two numbers that change how every following conversation is held.

If you want a second set of eyes on what you find — or the version of this run against your actual card, your actual agreements, and your actual market — that is the work I do.

Run it, then reply to the message that sent you this with two things: your total, and the one check you scored lowest. I will tell you where I would start.

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