

# Bridgeway to Success™

June 2011

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**YOU DON'T HAVE  
TO BE BIG TO WIN.**

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## Rider Pride

It's known as "Rider Pride." The pride that fans have for the Saskatchewan Roughriders of the Canadian Football League (CFL). It's a pride that defies demographics. How is it that the smallest market team in the CFL can account for *over 50%* of all league merchandise sold?

Jim Hopson, president of the Riders since 2005, tells a compelling story. Aside from their impressive on-field success – six straight playoff appearances, four conference finals, three Grey Cup appearances and one championship over the past six years – the real secret lies in what they've done off the field.

**1) Connect with the Customers.** Hopson emphasized from the outset that the Riders are in the entertainment business. So the first priority was to improve the game-day experience making it fun and desirable for everyone. Public bands were hired to promote tailgating and pre-game festivities. A state-of-the-art video-board was installed in the stadium. Customized jerseys were made and sold in real-time in the concourses. Concessions were expanded and washrooms upgraded.

Hopson's team got serious about retail merchandising. At the stadium and in dedicated retail outlets they hired skilled staff with expertise in buying, merchandising, pricing and promotions. The focus shifted from "trash & trinkets" to a broad range of readily available, high quality products.

**2) Connect with the Community.** Hopson knew that to grow Rider Pride they would have to better connect with the community and give back. The Riders took on numerous new initiatives supporting, among others, the children's hospital, an anti-bullying campaign and literacy promotion. A traveling hockey team was formed to engage communities throughout the province in the off-season. One of their more creative ventures was to co-brand with a cereal manufacturer and promote "Fantuz Flakes" – named after Andy Fantuz, a popular Riders player. A portion of the cereal sales is donated to charity.

**3) Connect with the Sponsors.** The Riders management realized that building sponsorships was about more than just asking for money and sending thank-you notes. They decided to get close to their sponsors and truly understand their marketing and sponsorship objectives. Then they crafted initiatives to help meet those objectives. This approach allowed the Riders to not only attract and retain quality sponsors but to charge market rates as well.

The result? Season ticket purchases, sponsorships and revenues have tripled over the past six years. Retail merchandise sales have increased nine-fold over the same time. The Riders have led the league in road attendance every year and have sold out every home game for the past four years.

Customers. Community. Sponsors. A winning game plan that every Rider fan can be proud of.

Michael Canic