

**Original Gladiators of Business**

**Foundations of Sport Management**

**Dr. Ketra Armstrong**

**3/29/2011**

This report is a comprehensive analysis of the Lakers organization. It includes a management and service quality audit. To go along with a SWOT analysis it also provides an analysis of the Lakers’ management of change. The report then concludes with suggestions for improvement.



Dr. Jerry Buss March 29, 2011

Owner, President, Governor, Los Angeles Lakers

Management Audit

Dear Dr. Buss:

This document is a comprehensive and critical analysis of the overall management of the Los Angeles Lakers. The audit was performed by Original Gladiators of Business (OGB). The analysis offers a management audit which includes an internal and external audit, as well as an analysis of the organizational culture. The internal audit includes a look at the mission (relevant to the different Stakeholders), resources, systems Process, organizational structure, management (functions, roles, necessary skills, etc.), and leadership. The external audit analyzed factors such as customers, competition, suppliers, workforce, shareholders, society, technology, governments, and economy. The analysis of the organizational culture includes values, beliefs, ethics, social responsibility, and globalization. In addition to a management audit, a service quality audit was performed. This audit investigated the consumers’ perceptions of the overall management and leadership of the organization. It also identified the consumers’ perceptions of the service of the organization. OGB also found factors consumers enjoy most and least about the experience. And finally OGB recorded the consumers’ ratings/evaluations of their overall experience and their suggestions to management for improvement.

With this information OGB was able to form a SWOT analysis, gauge the Lakers management of change, and suggestions for improvement. When discussing the management of change OGB determined the management of change relative to the Lakers. OGB critiqued and forecasted the forces of change, variables of change, and the change process as it pertains to the Lakers present and future ability to manage change.OGB’s suggestions of improvement was based on our analysis and insight, we offered specific suggestions for improving the overall management of the Lakers.

I am certain that the information provided in this report will be useful to overall Lakers Management Team, and will be particularly useful in your marketing efforts for the 2011-2012 seasons. If you have inquiries about the information in this report you can contact OGB at www.OGBinc.weebly.com.

All the Best,

Original Gladiators of Business

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Josh Rupprecht

Los Angeles Lakers

Los Angeles Lakers Fans

# Executive Summary

The Los Angeles Lakers are a professional basketball team that operates under the rules and regulations of the National Basketball Association. Over the last thirteen years, the Lakers have captured the NBA championship five times, bringing their total to sixteen as a franchise. The Lakers’ unparalleled success is due to great and intelligent ownership that understands the sports industry immensely. It is because of the ownership and the players alike that the Lakers have grown in revenue, even in difficult economic times, every year since 1999. Making full use of their resources and taking advantage of their corporate partnerships, the Lakers have been able to stay on top of the basketball world on and off the basketball court. Found through extensive research, the Lakers have adjusted to all forces of change to accommodate and cater to all of its fans and partners. In addition, the Lakers are an integral part of their community by outreaching, donating, and dedicating their time and money to further advance charitable causes and foundations. Although the Lakers are the model franchise of the NBA, their management team still strives each year to improve on any level possible. Therefore, throughout this report, it will be shown how the Lakers operate as an organization and what steps their management team takes to adjust to the ever-changing times.

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# Internal Environment

## Resources

In order for the Los Angeles Lakers to thrive as a professional basketball team and business, efficient and effective managerial resources are required. The following are the resources needed for the Lakers to succeed in the NBA on and off the court: 1) Human Resources, 2) Financial Resources, 3) Physical Resources, and 4) Informational Resources. A sport manager is responsible for achieving the sport organization’s objectives through efficient and effective utilization of these resources (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p.6).

## Human Resources

It has been stressed in every professional field that you are only as good as the people you have working for you, and this is ever so true in regards to the Lakers. The owner of the Lakers, Dr. Jerry Buss, expects nothing short of perfection from his top executive staff all the way down to the frontline employees. By hiring the top professionals in the industry, Dr. Buss ensures that his organization is being run effectively and efficiently, where he can provide oversight and instead of micromanaging his staff. As a result, a sense of trust is developed from the top leader all the way down to the lowest subordinate. Dr. Buss understands that his most important asset is his employees and this is why the Lakers have been immensely successful not only as a professional basketball team, but as a business as well.

Along with hiring the top professionals, the Lakers have also made it their mission to sign the best players in the NBA in order to give themselves the best opportunity to win every year. As avid sport fans, we all know that winning turns into profit since everyone wants to see a winning team and engulf themselves with pride and victory. In order to ensure that the Lakers are winning, the necessary pieces need to be in place, which goes back to the most important of all resources: humans. Dr. Buss, along with his executive staff, has made sure to hire the best of the best in the industry; it is their utilization of their skills that have advanced the Lakers to the top of the basketball world.

## Financial Resources

Given the geographic location and the extensive history of winning, the Los Angeles Lakers do not have difficulties attaining the financial resources to prosper. Los Angeles is a large market and Dr. Buss has sure made use of it. As a result, *Forbes* has listed the Lakers as the second most valuable NBA team at $643 million in 2011, an increase of 6% from the previous year. Just to give insight to the Lakers success, from the twelve 2009-10 playoff home games hosted by the Lakers, over 20 million dollars was made, averaging out to 1.6 million dollars per payoff home game at the Staples Center. It is this type of success that has allowed the Lakers to sign the best players and hire the best personnel. In addition, the Lakers also have sponsorships and partnerships with major global companies that have allowed them the freedom to grow financially every year. Some of the major sponsors include: Toyota Motor, American Express, Verizon Wireless, and Staples to name a few (*Forbes.com*, 2010).

## Physical Resources

In order for the Lakers to operate successfully, physical resources are needed. Some of these sources include but are not limited to sport arenas, training facilities, headquarter offices, and general business supplies. The Lakers currently play in the Downtown LA AEG-owned arena, Staples Center that has a maximum capacity of 18,997. Aside from this, the Lakers also have their training facility called the Toyota Center located in El Segundo, CA, where they hold their weekly practices and training sessions. The Lakers Headquarters is also located in this same facility, where some of the top executives are based out of. As stated earlier, the Lakers have a plethora of financial options where they have the ability to make renovations and upgrades to their physical resources in order to remain as the elite franchise in the NBA. The Lakers have effectively and efficiently utilized their resources to “get the job done” (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p.6).

## Informational Resources

The Lakers are located adjacent to the entertainment capital of the world, Hollywood, making their ability to funnel information to their fan base and partners somewhat challenging. When being surrounded by vast media and saturated outlets, the Lakers have utilized their informational resources to disseminate information to the public on a timely manner (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p.7). Their use of social medial networks like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to keep their fan base informed of injury reports, game statistics, and player photos is an incredible method of involving the public with all Lakers-related news. Aside from this, the Lakers operate their own official website, publish the *Lakers Magazine*, and create an annual media guide to further inform their fans and businesses of who the Lakers are. Lastly, the ability of the Lakers to quickly distribute information is the reason for their vast fan base not only in Los Angeles, but around the world.

## Systems Process

The systems process is the method used to transform inputs into outputs, and this process is essentially implemented and executed by the management team (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p. 28). This is a four-step process consisting of inputs, transformation, outputs, and feedback. Within the Lakers organization, its inputs include the resources explained above, whereby human, financial, physical, and informational resources are all operating necessities to ensure the successful transformation of outputs. Transformation is the process by which the inputs turn into outputs, meaning the labor and work that Lakers employees provide. The outputs are the different levels of satisfaction experiences by each member/consumer, meaning for the Lakers the satisfaction of their fans and employees (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p. 28). Finally, the last step in the systems process is feedback, which ensures the transformation of inputs into outputs results in the desired outcome. An example of this would be surveys to obtain feedback about the overall fan experience at a Lakers’ game. The information collected from these surveys will help improve the fan experience by implementing various fan requests and concerns into game-day operations.

## Organizational Culture

The Lakers organizational structure is divided into different departments, where each department affects the organization as a whole and interchangeably (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p. 28-29). Being a greatly organized entity, the Lakers have achieved tremendous success by grouping its resources respectively to ensure accountability on all levels. At one point or another, every Lakers employee is crucial to the success of the organization. Figure 1 portrays the organizational structure of the Los Angeles Lakers.

## Management

As it has been stressed throughout this report, the Lakers hire the best in the sport industry; therefore, their management operates at immense capacity. In order to be as successful as the Lakers have been, certain skills, resources, and leaders are needed. The combination of taking on interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles with applied skills and knowledge is apparent within the Lakers organization. The Lakers are structured to succeed on and off the court; below you will find how their management functions through the different roles that are upheld and how their skills are essential to achieving the Lakers’ objective.

The Lakers’ management staff plan, they organize, they lead, and they control (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p. 27); these are the essentials of their management scheme. Below you will find how the Lakers organization manages each of these functions.

* Planning: Dr Jerry Buss holds himself to a standard of excellence, of which he expects the same from his management team. Planning is the process of setting objectives and determining in advance exactly how the objectives will be met (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p. 10). As seen through the Lakers’ continuous success every year in the game of basketball, it is apparent that the ownership, management, and coaching teams are taking all the necessary steps to plan effectively for winning championships every year. Every year, the Lakers’ objective is to raise one more championship banner, and more often than not, they fulfill this objective.
* Organizing: Once the planning stage is set, the next managerial step is delegating and coordinating tasks and resources to achieve the objective that was planned (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p. 10). From a basketball sense, this would be signing/scouting the best players and coaches around the world that will give you the best chance to win another title. In essence every Lakers’ employee is crucial to meeting the objective in mind.
* Leading: The Lakers have leaders on and off the court. Whether it is Kobe Bryant and Derek Fisher on the floor or Jeanie Buss behind a desk, the Lakers organization has taken the necessary measures of ensuring they have leaders guiding the organization to success. These leaders are incredible communicators and motivators, which in turn facilitates achieving the objective.
* Controlling: In order for the Lakers to achieve their planned objectives, there has to be follow-through from the management team. It is important to have leaders that will make the necessary adjustments through the process to ensure that objectives are being met.

## Leadership

Dr. Jerry Buss has attained boundless success throughout his ownership of the Lakers because he has hired an exceptional management staff to run his team. He has entrusted his company to individuals that are multi-talented leaders and professionals. The level of respect and trust that Dr. Buss has for his managers is the reason why he is one of the best team owners in all of American sports. His leadership style has never been to micromanage his staff, but to motivate and instill a sense of pride in his staff. Therefore, Dr. Buss is an organizational and charismatic leader.

In the locker room, however, the Lakers have another leader, Head Coach Phil Jackson the “Zen Master.” Jackson has employed leadership through the philosophical rout, where he gives his players books to read, helps them meditate, and teaches them the lesson of playing through difficult times. Another leader in the locker room and more visibly on the court is Kobe Bryant. Bryant juggles various leadership styles, but the most obvious is his ability to evoke energy, confidence, and courage from his teammates (Cuzzi, 2000, p.108). Although it may seem that an authoritarian leader is hard to manage, Bryant only employs this leadership on his teammates so that they can hold themselves to the same standard as Bryant does himself. It is very transparent that the Lakers have the right leaders in the front office and on the court, making them the titans of the basketball industry.

## Management of Change

The age we live in as sport fans, athletes, and sport managers is continuously changing every day. We no longer live in a world where information takes days to disseminate into the public. We no longer live in a world where business professionals are held to such high societal standards over athletes. Lastly, we no longer live in a world where sport is just a physical activity to leisurely spend our time. Today, information can be transmitted from one end of the world to the other in a matter of seconds. Today, athletes are role models and are held to higher standards than other professionals because of their public image. Today, the sport industry is a multi-billion industry and continues to grow through corporate sponsorships and partnerships. Therefore, in order for the Lakers to adjust to this continuous change, they have ensured that they have all the means necessary to manage change effectively and efficiently.

Change agents include the following: environmental, economic, social, demographic, and technological forces. Due to the Lakers being located in a very advantageous location, Los Angeles, and that basketball is played in arenas, the Lakers do not have many environmental forces they need to adjust to. The biggest forecasted environmental factor that may keep fans from coming to watch the Lakers play is the rain, but even so the Lakers play in a great arena where the environment does not play a role in their success, which explains their constant sell out games. The Lakers have also managed change when it comes to economic forces by growing in revenue every year for the last ten years (*Forbes.com*, 2010). With their great financial stability, the Lakers can afford to pay the NBA luxury tax for exceeding the salary cap, and keep paying their players millions of dollars (Lussier & Kimball, 2004, p. 176). The social forces that the Lakers have encountered are that they are perceived outside of Los Angeles, as a complacent and super-power team that can “flip the switch” whenever they want. The Lakers have adjusted to this social force by showing humility through their losses and have proven themselves off the court to be dedicated to their charitable foundations. Again, the Lakers’ management team is responsible for establishing this sense of pride and humility to manage change in the social forces. Demographically, the Lakers have been very mindful of their different fan bases. Hosting events like “Noche Latina” and “Black History Month” shows the Lakers ability to cater to their range of fans located in Los Angeles. As explained before, one the reasons why the Lakers have been so successful is because of their ability to disseminate information quickly to everyone around the world. They have taken full use of social media networks and other media outlets to relay their information at great speeds to the public.

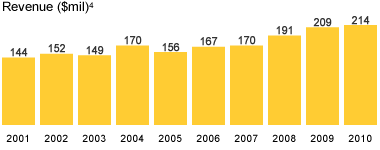
Aside from these forces, the Lakers have also adjusted to changes in management functions. The integration of new players, employees, and fans into the organization in any capacity is facilitated by the Lakers’ management team. Therefore, the Lakers are fully equipped to handle any variable of change. Whether it is strategy, structure, technology, or people, the Lakers have managed to succeed in an age where change agents have lifted the face of the sport industry. By doing so the Lakers have established themselves as an organization that can manage denial, resistance, exploration, and commitment from their employees, partnerships, and fan base. Dr. Jerry Buss and his management team have instilled a sense of trust and security down to their staff and frontline workers to secure that change agents are being accounted for when planning for new objectives in the future.

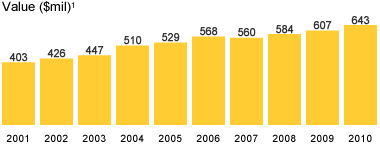
# External Environment

An organization’s external environment includes factors outside of its boundaries that affect its performance. Although managers can control the organization’s internal environment, their influence over what happens outside the organization is limited. The external environment is defined by nine factors, economy, customers, competition, suppliers, workforce, shareholders, society, technology, and government.

## Economy

A major factor is the United States’ economy. The recent change in our nation’s economy has been a key component to the operation any business, including the Lakers organization. Today, the average NBA team is worth $369 million which shows a 1% growth from last year. Despite the growth, several of the league’s 30 teams have not fully recovered from the recession, and as a result values are still 2.6% below the $379 million average they hit two seasons ago (Ozanian, 2011). Although the disadvantage of our struggling economy weighs down on opportunity of growth, as you can see on the charts below there has been consistent pattern of growth for the Lakers despite the nation’s economic struggles.





As previously stated, the team hosted 12 playoff games which generated more than $20 million from tickets and concessions after the NBA took their cut of the revenue pie. The Lakers also enjoyed the seventh-highest average attendance in the league (18,997) with the league's highest ticket prices. The Lakers also have one of the richest cable deals in the NBA. So to be an organization growing within a struggling economy is quite of an accomplishment.

## Customers

One of the main reasons the Lakers appear to be recession-proof is the strong relationship with their customers. The Los Angeles Lakers’ customers are an intriguing group in multiple regards. From one aspect, the Lakers have a competitive advantage with their fan base actually becoming an asset. They are one of the few organizations that have fans that attract other fans. Celebrity fan attendance at Lakers games has created a utopia for Hollywood crazed fans who want to see and be seen. With that being noted, it is interesting how seemingly uninterested Lakers fans are in the actual game. But on the other end of the spectrum there are the Lakers’ diehard fans most notably locates in the “300’s” (highest section of the Staples Center). Despite their seating they still receive the service a higher price ticket holder would receive. This is done by giveaways, getting acknowledged on the scoreboard, etc. Looking at the chart below you can see how attendance has not changed much since 1999.

**Los Angeles Lakers Attendance**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Total** | **Avg** |
| 2009-10 | 778,877 | 18,997 |
| 2008-09 | 778,877 | 18,997 |
| 2007-08 | 778,877 | 18,997 |
| 2006-07 | 778,415 | 18,985 |
| 2005-06 | 774,189 | 18,882 |
| 2004-05 | 770,494 | 18,792 |
| 2003-04 | 777,657 | 18,967 |
| 2002-03 | 777,788 | 18,970 |
| 2001-02 | 778,777 | 18,995 |
| 2000-01 | 776,336 | 18,935 |
| 1999-00 | 771,420 | 18,815 |

The Lakers also have a strong relationship with their sponsors who contribute the to value of the Lakers. These sponsors include Toyota Motors, American Express, Anheuser-Busch, Verizon Wireless Carl's Jr, etc. Due to the Lakers’ ability to generate a strong brand equity, they have developed a strong portfolio of sponsors/partners. Shaquille O’Neal, one of the most popular Lakers of all time once said, "I'm tired of hearing about money, money, money. I just want to play the game, drink Pepsi, and wear Reebok." This quote expresses the role sponsors play in sport. The sponsors use the Lakers as a way to publicize their brand and in return, they provide money as well as services to the final consumer. It actually benefits the Lakers dually since they are receiving money and the sponsors are also providing Lakers fans an enhanced experienced. For example, Verizon’s “LAKERS TXT2WIN ON-AIR SWEEPSTAKES” is not only generating funds for the Lakers, two Lakers fans will also receive free tickets to attend a future game. Therefore the fans are satisfied and so are the Lakers’ and their bank account.

## Suppliers

Another key component to the Lakers’ success is their suppliers. A key supplier to be noted is Anschutz Entertainment Group Worldwide (AEG). AEG owns and operates the Staples Center, which is the facility in which the Lakers play. Staples center was built in 1998 and became the Lakers’ home court the following year. Located in Downtown Los Angeles and the home of four professional sports franchises, the NBA's Los Angeles Lakers and Los Angeles Clippers, the NHL's Los Angeles Kings, and the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks, Staples Center has proven to be a home court advantage for the local teams. The arena seats up to 19,079 for basketball games. Two-thirds of the arena's seating, including 2,500 club seats, are in the lower bowl. There are also 160 luxury suites, including 15 event suites, on three levels between the lower and upper bowls. And since AEG also provides the workers needed for event operations, Lakers do not have to contract any third party to perform that.

## Workforce

Since the supplier provides the majority of the workers needed for the Lakers to operate, the Lakers only have to hire their players, their staff, and management. Most of these hires are structured by the NBA. For Example, you can only have 15 players on your roster. As far as staff, every NBA team has a similar staff in regards to a coaching staff, trainers, a general manager, etc. One of the most interesting aspects of the NBA workforce is the Player’s Association, whose president, Derick Fisher, is the Lakers’ starting point guard. The National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) is the union for current professional basketball players in the National Basketball Association (NBA). Established in 1954, the NBPA mission is to ensure that the rights of NBA players are protected and that every conceivable measure is taken to assist players in maximizing their opportunities and achieving their goals, both on and off the court (About the NBPA l National Basketball Player's Association , 2011).

## Governments

The NBPA’s regulations are just one set of many that include other governing bodies that effect the Lakers decisions. From the national government, to the NCAA, to the NBA, all have their hand in controlling minor or major aspects of the Lakers. An example on the national level is the federal government permits the NBA to, at the expense of individual teams, to systematically maintain control of national television exposure if its games. This is because the NBA, not the individual teams, must have the ability to control the overall exposure of its games in order to maintain the value of national television right contracts (Rosner & Shropshire, 2004). The Lakers however have such a high demand with their large fan base, they are able to supply their own television contracts. Recently signing a 20 year contract means that they are getting exposure and money from Time Warner. The NCAA’s hand in the Lakers’ operations is based on the potential players that could be drafted to the roster. The relationship between the NBA and NCAA is dry and seemingly inexistent. Therefore, one can assume the battle for athletes can create subtle rules that have grand implications. For example if a men’s basketball athlete declares that he is entering the draft and the deadline to change his mind passes, he can no longer be student athlete. This is the case even when the player does not get drafted. This is obviously a way to sway students from leaving to the NBA before graduation. The NBA itself is probably the most demanding and controlling government that the Lakers have to abide to. The NBA has regulations on the player’s salaries, as well the collective bargaining agreement which is a 241 page document that covers all the specifics of player/management relations.

## Society

A lot of the governing the NBA has in place is due to the society it exists in. The historical culture of the Lakers has contributed to expectations of the society. The pressures placed upon the Lakers from its society incur change. One expectation is winning. Lakers are a prestigious franchise that is expected to be amongst the best. Therefore it is also expected the management go after the best players available. Looking at players like Kobe Bryant and noting he is the highest paid player in the NBA, it is inevitable that the Lakers are aware of this pressure and are performing accordingly. Pressure not only comes from the fans but also the NBA. One key component that involves society is the NBA’s focus on globalization. Commissioner, David Stern, has made it known he wants to reach a broader market by marketing worldwide to large cities with a demand for basketball. This demand becomes specifically interesting for the Los Angeles Lakers because of the diversity of the city they call home. Los Angeles and the surrounding cities are amongst the most diverse in the United States. This is mainly due to the Hispanic and Latin population. Coincidentally, the Lakers have a player by the name Pau Gasol who was born in Spain. They have been able to use his stardom to intimately reach a demographic that some teams in the league cannot reach. Kobe Bryant, the most popular player in the NBA according to BIGresearch and Forbes, has also been a great asset for international business. In 2010 the Lakers played in Barcelona as well as London. In such an early stage of globalizing live basketball games, there is still much opportunities to be capitalized. But based on the response to the Lakers’ acceptance in other countries it would be probable that international games will become a tradition.

## Competition

The capability to capitalize on the benefits such as globalization is an asset that few teams possess. Even other sport teams in Los Angeles don’t have that capability to create a demand strong enough to create a global buzz like the Lakers. Despite not being able to compete on an international level, there is undoubtedly competition within the city of Los Angeles. There are six professional teams in the Los Angeles area with two more being currently considered. Los Angeles also has another professional basketball team, Clippers, whom directly competes with the Lakers. In actuality, competition for the Lakers is far broader when including all aspects of entertainment instead of just sport entertainment specifically. Especially in an area such as Los Angeles where there is, recreationally, so much to do rather than go to a basketball game. But for the sake of specificity, this audit focuses on professional sport teams. Lakers currently hold the most prestigious position amongst all of the teams in Los Angeles. Out of all the teams in Los Angeles, the Lakers have the most recent championships. Therefore they hold the title as the best team in Los Angeles.

## Shareholders

Conquering the completion is good news for the Lakers’ shareholders. Owner Jerry Buss is the primary shareholder. According to USA Today, Buss is worth around $380 million. Another ket shareholder is Phillip Anschutz. He is the principal owner of AEG. Anschutz also is an owner of the Los Angeles Kings. AEG also owns and operates Home Depot Center, and LA Live. According to Forbes, Anschutz is worth about $6 billion. Despite the great difference in net worth, Buss owns a much larger percentage of the Lakers. Anschutz’s authority is undoubtedly noticed however especially in terms of the fan experience. One substantial move made by Anschutz is the addition of LA Live. LA Live is an entertainment district that surrounds Staples Center and Nokia Theatre. The area features music venues, night clubs, restaurants, a bowling alley, a museum, and movie theaters. LA Live is the premier destination for live entertainment. Buss on the other hand, deals more with the actual Lakers organization and its players. As Jerry Buss once said, “Some time ago, talking to some people, they wanted a bonus if the Lakers made the playoffs. I said, `Bonus? If we don’t make the playoffs, you don’t work here anymore.” This statement shows not only his control over the team but his dedication to winning.

## Technology

Last but not least, is the factor of technological change. Technology’s effects over all types of business and operations are just as prevalent in sport. The computer has changed the way sport organizations conduct and transact business. Sport, intuitively, is a very interactive industry. Technology has boosted that relationship of fan and organization. For example, social networks allow direct communication with mass amounts fans that, a couple decades ago, would not get this type of intimate attention. Another way technology has played a major role for the Lakers are sales in tickets and merchandise. Kobe Bryant’s jersey is the most bought jersey worldwide. This would not be possible if it were not for technology. It allows international fans to see the Lakers and their merchandise. Tickets are also very easy to obtain thank to the internet. A fan can find tickets in minutes and not have to move from the couch till game time.

Each of these external factors plays a pertinent role in the Lakers organization. They have all shaped the internal environment that make up its organization. Aspects such as the mission, structure, resources, management, and systems process are related heavily to the external factor.

# Organizational Culture

Lakers’ organizational culture was audited by analyzing its values, beliefs, ethics, social responsibility, globalization and international business.

## Values, Beliefs, and Ethics

The Lakers values, beliefs, and ethics are evident from the highest level of management to the players on the court. The first priority is win games. Jerry Buss is praised for having 10 NBA championships which makes him the most decorated owner in major professional sports. During his tenure, not only have the Lakers won 10 rings, they have also made 16 appearances in the NBA Finals. His Lakers are also responsible for recording the most victories and the highest winning percentage in the NBA. That winning culture is consistent throughout. The Lakers’ Head Coach, Phil Jackson possesses 11 of the last 20 NBA championships. He has the best winning percentage of any NBA coach. He was also the fastest coach in NBA history to get to 1000 wins. Then there is Kobe Bryant, who is a five time NBA champion, a Most Valuable Player, and an Olympic gold medalist. Winning is inevitably one of the main forces driving the Lakers organization. Another force is the community. Lakers have numerous foundations and outreach programs. Not only does the organization as a whole have multiple community based programs but their players also have programs that are helpful for their community. From Ron Artest, who has recently used his celebrity to bring awareness to mental health issues by speaking to schoolchildren about his personal experiences to Matt Barnes who started the non-profit organization, Athletes vs. Cancer. Barnes’ organization is an industry-wide fundraising program that unites sports, sports fans and the community in the fight against cancer. The list of players that participate in or head these kinds of programs continues.

## Social Responsibility

Social Responsibility is the conscious decision to operate in an ethical manner that creates a win-win situation for all the stakeholders. The only issue of social responsibility is that it does not guarantee a financial payoff. There are multiple levels of social responsibilities. There is social obstruction where managers purposely perform unethical or illegal business practices. The second level is social obligation where managers meet only the minimum legal requirements. The third level is social reaction where managers respond to requests from the society’s civic groups. The highest level of social responsibility is social involvement. At this level mangers voluntarily initiate socially responsible acts. A social audit will show that the Lakers are definitely in the social involvement category. When looking at the Lakers community efforts, it is apparent that they are initiating the community with opportunities for betterment. For example, the Lakers have an entire department dedicated to community relations. Within the department there are multiple programs that involve social responsibility. The program that demonstrates social involvement is the Lakers Youth Foundation. The Los Angeles Lakers Youth Foundation's goal is to assist nonprofit community organizations based on need. With the Foundation's focus on the use of sports to promote education, teamwork and self-esteem among Los Angeles area youth, their fundraising directly supports these initiatives by providing financial assistance to children and local youth programs. (Lakers : Foundation , 2011) With this program, the Lakers are promoting entrepreneurship to get the community motivated to create its own opportunities. This is just one of many programs that Lakers perform.

## Globalization

The Lakers’ vision is bigger than just the Los Angeles community. Larger than the state of California and even larger the United States as a whole. The Lakers have recently set their scopes on further globalizing their brand. The NBA and the Lakers have made recent moves to broaden the lines of potential NBA fans. The internet alone has globalized the NBA but few teams have been able to take it a step further. The Lakers are one of those select few that have been able to penetrate culture unforeseen by previous generations of NBA basketball. They have played games overseas and plan to continue that to further capitalize on the demand that countries around the nation have for the NBA. Look for the Lakers to really use their connection to the Spanish community with the use of Pau Gasol as a crutch. They have already played in Barcelona which was a homecoming for Gasol. Broadening the Lakers community means more fans, which also means more money.

# Service Quality

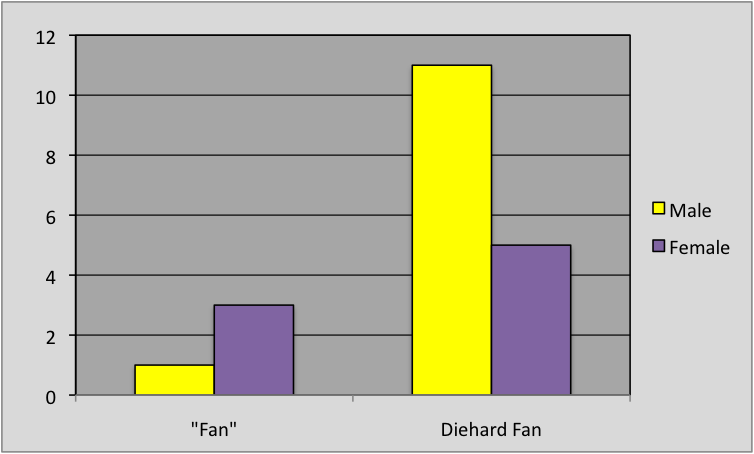
The overall perception that fans and consumers have of the Los Angeles Lakers is undoubtedly positive. When talking to people in attendance at the game, there were definitely mixed feelings regarding certain elements of the organization, but they all resorted back to having a positive outlook on the Lakers. However, after several years of success and gaining the reputation of being an arrogant team, the Lakers have also gained many followers that hold a dislike towards their organization, also known as “Laker Haters”. The Lakers are one of those teams that you either love or hate and they have numerous amounts of both.

The perception of the Lakers management is also well admired. Fans and consumers are aware of the great job the management is doing in order to keep their team on top and a yearly contender. The Lakers organization currently has the highest player expenses in the NBA at $91 million (Forbes, 2010). Management is not frugal nor is it scared to spend their money. They also benefit from having high yearly revenue that allows for expansion and improvement. While most consumers are aware of this and thankful for a great team and arena, they are also being hit with the consequential high prices that go along with being a successful organization. A portion of the Lakers fan base is becoming irritated with the continuously increasing price in tickets and concessions. According to Forbes, the Lakers have the highest average ticket price in the NBA at $113, while no other team in the league is close to $100 (2010). Even though it has no relevance to Lakers management, some fans even complain of high gas prices and how expensive it is to get to Staples Center. The frustration grows as the night continues and the money diminishes from consumers’ pockets. However, by looking at the graph below, one can see that despite the negative feedback towards high prices, the fans and consumers who attend Lakers games are still extremely pleased with their overall experience at Staples Center.



*The graph is comprised of data collected during a Lakers game at Staples Center. Each topic is represented by the average answer given by fans on a scale of 1-5 (1 equaling the worst and 5 equaling the best).*

Another concern that is expressed by fans is the idea of the Lakers organization straying away from their roots and true fans and going corporate. Because Lakers games have become such a popular social event, beyond just a basketball game, more and more business executives and “suits” are attending games. The general population is unable to keep up with the steep prices these suits are willing to pay. The perceptions that consumers have about people who attend Lakers games are changing for the worse. It is thought that the diehard fans that truly care about the Lakers are being pushed out the door in order to make more money. While this is happening, the consumers attending games lack knowledge and interest in basketball. They also lack the rowdiness that most powerhouse franchises and their fans provide on any given night. Below is a graph that represents the amount of diehard fans compared to the amount of people who go to games for the social aspect, also known as trend followers.



*Out of 20 participants, 12 were male and 8 were female. The data may be somewhat flawed because the majority of the participants had purchased cheap seats in the upper levels.*

Even with fans having some negative outlooks regarding the management of the Lakers, the game day experience at Staples Center is second to none. There are many aspects of a Lakers game that no other organization can provide. The overall aura surrounding a game has fans entranced throughout the spectacle. From having numerous amounts of celebrities and Hollywood stars at every game to seeing the beautiful Lakers girls strut their stuff during breaks; the average consumer is always on the lookout for something eye catching and memorable. Another overlooked aspect of watching a Lakers games is the quality of basketball that is being played by both teams. Because the Lakers are such a dominant team in the NBA as well as two-time Champions in 2009 and 2010, the opposing team usually brings their A-game in attempt to prove themselves against the best. The organization has transformed the standard NBA basketball court at Staples Center into a stage for the best players in the world to play on that everyone wants to see. Staples Center is a state of the art facility that has become the center attraction of downtown Los Angeles. Once entering the arena and seeing all the happy, excited fans, all eyes are drawn to the spotlighted center court where the players warm up. Up in the rafters of the arena hang huge banners that represent their 16 Championships and the great Lakers that were honored by having their jerseys retired. Gazing at these banners makes one realize how prestigious the Lakers franchise really is and all the history that this organization possesses. As game time approaches, the lights go off and drapes are dropped from the jumbotron creating a gigantic 360-degree projection screen. A hype video containing clips from previous seasons is played on the screen for all to see as the Lake Show begins. This type of atmosphere often continues throughout the game because the Lakers usually win, leaving the majority of those attending the game in an ecstatic state of emotion.

# Strategic Analysis

## Strengths

The Los Angeles Lakers are a proven organization year after year, which is shown by their steady fan base, filling the arena on any given night as well as their 16 total Championships (five of them coming in the last 13 years). Their fan base includes everyone from the top celebrities and CEO’s sitting courtside, to the lower class multicultural families sitting in the nose bleed seats. Even during an economic downfall, having such a large fan base helps organizations such as the Lakers increase their yearly revenue. They are also heavily supported by the corporate world with numerous sponsors. The owner and president Jerry Buss, along with co-owner and billionaire Phillip Anschutz provide the organization with limitless possibilities regarding facilities, player contracts, community support, fan attraction, etc. The Lakers also have the good fortune of employing arguably the greatest basketball player of his time and maybe even in the history of the NBA, Kobe Bryant. In terms of fan attraction and marketability, the possibilities are endless. The Lakers General Manager, Mitch Kupchak, is very proactive in surrounding their star player with a strong supporting cast, which translates directly into a championship caliber team that many people want to watch and follow. Leading this highly paid and highly skilled group of athletes is the well renowned, highly respected, Zen master himself, Phil Jackson. Phil is known for winning and winning a lot. Fans and consumers are much more likely to watch a team that consistently wins, especially when the faces and leaders of the franchise are both winners as well.

On top of all these influential individuals, the Lakers have something that no other team has; the Laker Girls. Other teams may have cheerleaders and dance teams, but the Laker Girls are on a level of their own. Jerry Buss and his Laker Girls introduced the concept of NBA organizations having dance teams. They now carry a reputation of being the best and the most beautiful because they are the ones who revolutionized the sport of basketball. This standard must be met because they perform in front of one of the most judgmental and egotistical cities around. Eyes rarely stray from the court during dead time between game play because the Laker Girls draw so much attention. During the entire event, they also dim the lights over the audience in order to draw more focus to what is happening on the court. The atmosphere at Staples Center during a Lakers game is unlike any other.

## Weaknesses

Kobe Bryant and Phil Jackson have not always seen eye to eye. In the past, they were constantly butting heads, allowing for several drama stories to reach the media, who then dragged them out like they always do. Bad publicity is not always good publicity in the Sport Industry. It is very distracting for the players, coaching staff, management, and even fans. Phil Jackson published a tell all book in 2004, *The Last Season: A Team In Search of Its Soul*, which bashed on individual players as well as exposing a lot of the secrets and disputes that went on during the previous seasons. Kobe Bryant had many moments as a Los Angeles Lakers that he wishes he could do over. In 2003, Bryant shocked the world as he was charged with sexual assault. The charges were later dropped, but the damage had already been done. His image around the league was destroyed after letting down his family, friends, teammates and fans. It took him several years to rebuild that image that so many people had fallen in love with and it can be argued that it still haunts him to this day. Even though these incidents happened in the past, people never forget and the media enjoys bringing back old news. Because these two influential leaders of the Lakers carry this extra baggage, they are often forced to deal with pestering reporters and dodge questions that have little relevance to the present. It does not take a lot for the media to turn a couple poorly answered questions into a breaking news story, followed by TV analysts comparing it to past stories and having it once again becoming a distraction for the franchise.

Being such a large and well-attended event on a daily basis, the Lakers organization and the Staples Center must employ hundreds of people to ensure that every game is run smoothly. Managing hundreds of employees is a difficult task and on some occasions, poorly trained staff members who lack customer service slip through the crack and have a negative influence on consumers’ overall experience. Because the Lakers are one of the most successful organizations in sports, they have the ability to increase ticket prices. Even though they do not struggle to sell tickets, they lose out on higher attendance rates because middle and lower class consumers are scared away by the higher than average prices.

## Opportunities

The Los Angeles Lakers are at the top of any list regarding sports and business. They are the top franchise in the sport savvy city of Los Angeles. Staples Center is located in the heart of the city and is surrounded by other consumer attractive businesses such as LA Live, popular restaurants, and tourist friendly hotels. They feed off of each other, both receiving profitable visits from a constant flow of fans. Los Angeles is in the top two of the largest and most successful sport cities in the United States (Burke, 2009). Attending a Lakers game has evolved from simply just a basketball game into what is now known more as a social event. They have marketed their team well by utilizing the fame and fortune, the glitz and glam of Hollywood and all of the local stars and celebrities. The average consumer in attendance at a Lakers game is no longer just a basketball fan, but also a fan of the entertainment business. In today’s society, the everyday consumer is seen as a trend follower more often than not. Los Angeles is known for being a trendy city and with the Lakers recent success of back-to-back NBA Championships, attending games is the thing to do. As of 2011, the County of Los Angeles has a population of 9,818,605 and growing (Greninger, 2011). Los Angeles County is a very diverse area that has a great interest in sports, offering a perfect market for any sport organization. The Lakers have the upper hand of being the most prestigious franchise in the area and arguably has the largest fan base in Los Angeles.

The Lakers, along with the NBA and their global community outreach initiative NBA Cares, are very proactive in the community and make sure that they continuously have a close involvement with their city and other parts of the world. Over the last couple years, the NBA has also been working hard to globalize its market around the world. Because the Lakers have Kobe Bryant, their fan base immediately increases as the NBA’s efforts continue to draw in more fans. Globalization for the NBA becomes easier with every passing year as technology makes advancements. Marketing through the Internet surpasses the old techniques of using newspapers, radio, etc. Social networking such as Facebook, Twitter and Myspace has revolutionized the Sport Industry. Fans all around the world can follow what their favorite player, such as Kobe Bryant, is doing throughout the day. Being a fan has become much more personable, which benefits the organization because the consumer is now more likely to spend money in support of their team.

## Threats

Location of Staples Center is also seen negatively. Los Angeles is most commonly known for constant, unforgiving traffic. Lakers games often begin around 7:30 PM, which means the majority of the fans attending the game must drive in rush hour traffic in order to reach the venue on time. Parking is also an issue because there is not one big lot for everyone to park. There are a variety of random lots throughout the city ranging in prices from $5-$25. When providing tourists and first time consumers with these unnecessary choices, it causes confusion and is overwhelming when unfamiliar with the area. Arriving on time is a rare occurrence at Lakers games; most of the fans filter into their seats throughout the first half losing out on the full experience of attending a game. With Los Angeles being such a large sports city, it also brings a lot of competition for the Lakers. There are multiple organizations for all of the major sports in Los Angeles besides football, however they are currently working on bringing back a NFL team. The owners of the Sacramento Kings are currently exploring the idea of relocating their franchise to the city of Anaheim, adding a third NBA team to southern California (Ziller, 2011). The Lakers also share their facilities, the Staples Center, with several other organizations. One of the teams that shares the Lakers home court is the under respected Los Angeles Clippers. In the past, many of the Clippers fans have been known to jump on the Lakers’ bandwagon after a long season of disappointment. After many years of rebuilding, the Clippers now have a new face to their franchise as their popularity in the city of Los Angeles rapidly grows.

# Summary of Assessment

The majority of our research and information came from websites via Google. The most beneficial sites that we came across were Forbes.com and the Los Angeles Lakers home website where we were able to find their 2010-2011 Media Guide. As a group, we went through several e-mails and phone calls in attempt to meet with a Lakers representative and get a hard copy of the Lakers Media Guide. They were unable to meet with us, unwilling to give us the hard copy, and overall were not very helpful in providing us with information on the Lakers management. Other references that were used throughout this project came from the KIN 521 Foundations of Sport Management reading packet. More specifically, within the packet we referenced Sports Leadership by Cuzzi, Managing change and Managing sport by Lussier. We also checked out some books from the library, but they did not provide us with useful information for our analysis. Lastly, our common knowledge of the sport of basketball and the Lakers organization allowed us to tie together all of the information we collected from the different references.

# Suggestions for Improvement

No organization is perfect; no matter how successful it may be over a period of time. However, an organization such as the Los Angeles Lakers, who can generate an increase in yearly revenue, keep consumers happy and coming back to games, as well as continuing to be one of the most successful franchises in the NBA, deserve a lot of credit for their accomplishments. The Lakers management team has done a great job of keeping their organization towards the top of the list of most successful franchises in sports. In times of struggle, the Lakers management is quick to the punch as they learn from their mistakes and show their ability to overcome adversity. Suggesting that the Lakers change certain aspects of their business scheme is nitpicking, but one important area that could see improvement during the next couple seasons is to show more appreciation for the lifelong, diehard fans.

Many of the consumers who purchase tickets in the upper sections are paying very high rates. These consumers are more often than not, middle and lower class individuals and families that cannot afford these rates on a weekly basis. The goal of the Lakers’ management is to increase revenue and when applying the laws of supply and demand, there is no reason to lower prices because simply put, people will still buy tickets. However, there are other ways of giving back to the loyal fans that save portions of every paycheck in order to attend one or two Lakers games each season. Having more fan nights where there are free giveaways and package deals so the consumer is getting more for their money would help boost moral. For instance, over the past couple seasons, Jack in the Box has provided every fan in attendance with two free tacos if the Lakers win and hold the opposing team under 100 points. This is now a Lakers tradition, where one could commonly hear the chants of “We want tacos! We want tacos!” throughout Staples Center towards the end of games. Fans and consumers love free stuff because they feel that they are getting the best of the deal, when in reality the organization is actually building their future revenue by increasing the chances of having the customers return. The sponsorship with Jack in the Box generates money for both businesses so essentially all three parties win. Also, providing better service to all consumers in attendance instead of just the VIP’s could improve the overall experience for everyone. For the amount of money that the average consumer spends on concessions, the quality and portion size should be greatened as well. Another way of assisting the low-income consumer is by cutting out the third party online ticket scalpers who immediately increase the prices for an already expensive commodity. Understanding the idea of generating as much revenue as possible, it is in the best interest of the Lakers organization to keep ticket prices as they are because they continue to sell. In the end, the Los Angeles Lakers and their management team have little to improve on because they continue to be successful.

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**APPENDIX**

Figure 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **LOS ANGELES LAKERS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE** | |
|
| **Ownership** | |
| Owner, President, & Governor | Dr. Jerry Buss |
| Co-Owner | Phillip F. Anschultz |
| Co-Owner | Edward P. Roski, Jr. |
| Director | Tim Leiweke |
|  | |
| **Executive** | |
| Executive VP, CEO, Director | Francis R. Mariani |
| Executive VP, Strategic Development | Johnny Buss |
| Executive VP, Business Operations | Jeanie Buss |
| General Counsel, Secretary | Jim Perzik |
| Senior VP, Finance, CFO | Joe McCormack |
| Senior VP, Business Operations, CMO | Tim Harris |
|  | |
| **Basketball Operations** | |
| General Manager: | Mitch Kupchak |
| Executive VP of Player Personnel: | Jim Buss |
| Assistant General Manager | Ronnie Lester |
| Head Coach | Phil Jackson |
| Assistant Coaches | Jim Cleamons, Frank Hamblen, |
|  | Chuck Person, Brian Shaw |
| Special Assistant Coaches | Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Craig Hodges |
| Director, Scouting/Basketball Consultant | Bill Bertka |
| Director of Basketball Administration | Glenn Carraro |
| Assistant to the General Manager | Rondre Jackson |
| Director, Video Services/Scout | Chris Bodaken |
| Video Coordinator | Patrick O'Keefe |
| Special Consultants | Walt Hazzard, Bill Sharman, Rudy Tomjanovich |
| Scouts | Gary Boyson, Adam Filippi, Kevin Grevey, |
|  | Irving Thomas, Gene Tormohlen, Ryan West |
| Athletic Trainer | Gary Vitti |
| Director, Athletic Performance/Player Development | Chip Schaefer |
| Athletic Performance Coordinator | Alex McKechnie |
| Assistant Athletic Trainer | Marco Nuñez |
| Equipment Manager | Rudy Garciduenas |
| Massage Therapist | Marko Yrjovuori |
| Basketball Operations Assistant | Tania Jolly, Kristen Luken |
|  | |
| **Team Physicians** | |
| Orthopedist | Dr. Steve Lombardo |
| Primary Internist | Dr. John Moe |
| Consultant | Dr. Michael Mellman |
| Dentist | Jeffrey P. Hoy, D.D.S. |
|  | |
| **Public Relations** | |
| Vice President, Public Relations | John Black |
| Senior Manager, Public Relations | Alison Bogli, Josh Rupprecht |
| Coordinator, Public Relations | Eugenia Chow |
| Coordinator, Community Relations | Jason McDevitt |
|  | |
| **Special Projects** | |
| Manager, Special Projects | Linda Rambis |
|  | |
| **Broadcast, Sponsorships, & Ticketing** | |
| Executive Director, Corporate Sponsorships | Eva Campbell, Ron Rockoff, Blain Skinner |
| Director, Corporate Sponsorships | Francis P. Mariani, Robin McLaughlin, Laura Scholnick |
| Director, Ticket Operations | Veronica Lawlor |
| Assistant Director, Ticket Operations | Charles Bingham |
| Director, New Media & Technology | Nick Kioski |
|  | |
| **Game Operations** | |
| Director, Game Operations and Entertainment | Lisa Estrada |
| Public Address Announcer | Lawrence Tanter |
| Team Photographer | Andrew Bernstein |
|  | |
| **Broadcasting** | |
| TV Announcers | Stu Lantz, Joel Meyers |
| Radio Announcer | Spero Dedes, Mychal Thompson |
|  | Fernando Gonzalez, Pepe Mantilla |
|  | |
| **Administration** | |
| Controller | Susan Matson |
| Executive Director, Information Technology | Tommy Yamada |
| Director, Legal and Corporate Administration | Terree Sholl |
| Director, Payroll and Personnel | Diane Rogers |