

# Moving Toward Marketing Oriented Soccer Referee Association Management: Factors Influencing USSF Referees' Intentions to Maintain or Abandon Certification.

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## Abstract

As soccer player participation grows in the U.S., the number of certified soccer referees is in decline. Marketing efforts to recruit new referees have not increased overall totals, as more referees abandon certification each year than recruitment efforts produce. The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) is one of several soccer referee certifying organizations working to recruit, develop, and retain referees. Research promotes a marketing oriented approach to managing associations, clubs, and professional societies to effectively recruit and retain membership. Relationship marketing offers a suitable framework to facilitate such an approach as it directs activities toward establishing and maintaining successful relational exchanges with customers. In moving toward a marketing oriented approach, managers must understand their “customers” to effectively plan and implement meaningful activities. This study lays a foundation for relationship marketing activities among soccer referee certifying organizations by identifying the factors influencing USSF referees’ intentions to maintain or abandon certification. Participant interviews among twelve (12) current and former USSF referees exposed six factors influencing intentions to maintain or abandon certification. Factors influencing intentions to maintain certification included achievement, camaraderie, and affirmation. Participants identified abuse from players, coaches and spectators, lack of organizational support and perceived failure as factors influencing intentions to abandon certification.

**Keywords:** Marketing Orientation, Relationship Marketing, Soccer Referees, Association Management

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and Practitioners:

This study is important to intra- and extra-organizational stakeholders related and unrelated to the sport of soccer, including association leaders, human resource professionals and marketing directors.

Track: Sports Marketing

ID#: 1297