

A Day Living the Suite Life

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Thursday, April 07 2011 8:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, April 07 2011 8:04 AM



A year ago, the Indians reached out to their fans, many of whom have the loudest voices, in an unprecedented fashion.

The Cleveland Indians hopped aboard this wild idea of "Social Media" and created a unique experience for bloggers, tweeters, and social media enthusiasts. They constructed a wooden deck beneath their bleacher seating next to the home run porch. They sectioned it off and placed a few outlets and a television within. As makeshift as you can get, literally days before the season.

If you were invited during the first half of the season, you received a media packet and access to a Wi-Fi network set up by the Indians. As time progressed, the Indians opened up the opportunity for you to apply. The ticket was free and you were encouraged to take pictures, tweet about the game, and blog about your experience. As they put it, it was just another way to connect with fans.

This year, a new campaign has led to the Indians contingency venturing onto Twitter with Mark Shapiro, Chris Antonetti, and Manny Acta all opening accounts. The club has also produced and promoted social media discounts for games through Facebook and Twitter.

But perhaps their biggest hit will be the revamping of the "Social Deck," which has now become the "Social Suite." Instead of sending out invites to the deck, the Indians will now be extending invitations to fans to attend games to view a baseball game in a more luxurious fashion.

A Day Living the Suite Life

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Thursday, April 07 2011 8:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, April 07 2011 8:04 AM

I was lucky enough to be invited, not just to a game, but **the** game: [Opening Day](#) .

Off the Deck and into the Suite

From someone who's experienced the deck and the suite, obviously there are numerous advantages for attendees that are available in the suite that were not in the deck. One downfall to the deck was the weather. With the suite, the weather won't deter anyone from pulling out their phone or plugging in a laptop.

In fact, with the suite, it now becomes much easier for a Social Suite attendee to plug in and type away, with chairs and stools available inside the suite. It gives attendees more of a "VIP" and "media member" type feel.

One downfall to not being on the deck would be the fact that while you were sectioned off in the Social Deck, you still felt like a part of the fan base, just really special members of the fan base. However you still get the ability to go outside and watch the game like a normal fan, only [with a far more comfortable chair](#)

. The novelty of being in a suite should never get old, for anyone. With fans a-like still next to you outside, the "part of the crowd" feel should remain.

Extra check marks for having your own private restroom as well. You don't have to miss a second of the action and battle lines or walking time. The suite is just an overall incredible upgrade from being on the deck.

Experiencing Opening Day

I felt privileged to be invited to Opening Day more-so than I would have if I had been invited to any other game. Don't get me wrong, I would have appreciated it regardless, but to get the invite to attend what is likely the biggest day of the year for the Indians? That carried a little more weight when digital media coordinator Rob Campbell sent me the invite.

A Day Living the Suite Life

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Thursday, April 07 2011 8:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, April 07 2011 8:04 AM

Immediately when I walked into the Suite I was confronted with a counter filled with food. My initial thought wasn't that [I had walked into the Social Suite](#) , but I had just crashed a corporate suite to one of the Indians most valued sponsors. Yes I read the sign outside the door and the big painting on the wall was an indication of the right room, but still, this was not expected.

Now, don't go applying thinking you will get a nice buffet of food presented to you for free. Fortunately for the other nine attendees and me, this was a one-time deal due to Opening Day. Part of the novelty of going on Opening Day, the suite was stocked with not only food from their dining services, but beer from "Your Dad's Beer," a new stand at Progressive Field, and refreshments of water and Pepsi products.

However getting food will still be far easier if you wish. You can order à la carte, which is far more convenient than battling a line for nachos (if you can find them) or a hot dog, and the walking time you spend getting there, just like the restroom. If you want the ballpark feel, take the convenient steps or the elevators to the lower level. You really can't go wrong either way.

One suggestion if I had any would be to make refreshments such as water available for future games. One shouldn't expect the Indians to roll out a five course meal or even any food at every game, considered they're already inviting people down for free and putting them in a suite, but throwing some water in the fridge would be a nice touch.

Another fantastic experience brought to you only by the possibility of Opening Day was getting a unique opportunity [to snap a photo of the ball](#) Anne Feller set on the mound during the pregame ceremonies. If that isn't cool and exclusive, than I don't know what else is. Director of communications Curtis Danburg brought the ball up at one point in the game and took some time out to chat with attendees.

Remembering Bob Feller

Speaking of the pregame ceremonies, I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention how well put together and fitting the tribute was. To come up with the idea of a "silent" first pitch where Bob's widow Anne would simply set the ball down on the mound, it was nothing short of genius. It was fitting in the most way.

A Day Living the Suite Life

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Thursday, April 07 2011 8:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, April 07 2011 8:04 AM

The Indians definitely went all out, but they didn't do it in a way where it was overdone, which is hard to do when you "go all out" on something. The video was perfect, the [oversized picture and jersey in the outfield](#) was great, and everyone wearing the [number 19 jerseys during introductions](#) was a nice touch.

Back to the Suite

I got the full experience inside the suite and outside. It was cold, so given my choice, I and all the other attendees spent most our time inside [the suite rather than outside](#) sitting down. However I liked the ability to simply walk outside and just take in the game as you normally would.

At one point, I walked out and sat down and just started Tweeting the action. The suite gives you more of an opportunity to be interactive in that way, and that is where the deck lacked. Sure you could tweet from your seat and it wasn't hard. But now attendees can bring their laptops and just plug in. They have elbow room to pull out their phones and tweet game action or whatever else they want to tweet about.

Not to mention, I felt a lot more interaction with the fellow attendees this time around. You were closed in with the others, so I remember exchanging pleasantries with fellow Social Deck attendees. However inside the Suite you could walk around and mingle and hold different discussions with different people all throughout the game, while watching the game.

In a way, it's a coming together of these half Indians fans/half social media enthusiasts. The Suite opens up the possibility for more interaction and has a better environment for the attendees to do what they do best and what the whole concept of this "Social Media Gathering" is all about.

Ultimately, the goal the Indians had when they created this area is the same goal they have with the launching of their entire social media campaign. It's the reason they brought Mark Shapiro

A Day Living the Suite Life

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Thursday, April 07 2011 8:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, April 07 2011 8:04 AM

and Chris Antonetti onto Twitter. They want to connect with a fan base that is largely alienated from all the losing that's been going on.

What the Social Suite does is not only let them connect to some of their fans, it gives them an opportunity to make these bloggers and social media enthusiasts feel connected to the organization. I'm hesitant to use the word special, because I don't think that broad term accurately describes what they are going for. It's something a lot more than that.

These particular fans, the ones like myself with a louder voice that carries just a little bit farther than some of the more casual fans, they are an extension of that casual fan's voice. So if the Social Suite can make an impression and get the idea out that what the Indians are doing is right, they are changing the minds of more than just the 10 people they invite on a nightly basis.

They are reaching out to the hundreds and even sometimes thousands of people that are connected to the 10 they invite.

And that's why the Indians get it with this entire campaign.

To view my entire gallery of Opening Day pictures, you can visit my [blog's Facebook page](#) . You can apply for an invitation to the Social Suite by visiting the Indians site and [filling out an application](#)

You can follow Nino on Twitter @ [TheTribeDaily](#) where he tweets about Rango. You should also like his [blog on Facebook](#) because as mentioned, it has pictures.