

THE FAN EXPERIENCE



Over the past several years, fans have come to expect a whole host of value-added amenities along with their sporting events. They're looking for parking apps on the way to the stadium, customized tailgates for pregame, VR events that put them "on the field", and post-game concerts with A-list artists. From hospitality to merchandise to facility management, there has been an explosion in products and services designed to make the fan experience the best it's ever been.

A "Stupid-Awesome" idea is born — Blingware

Gary Merten dreamed it up four years ago and has turned it into the hottest commodity for championship fan gear.

The idea was to recreate a team's replica championship ring, such as a Super Bowl ring, out of cast alloy metal, encrust it with gemstones and mount it to a high-quality, durable cup.

It looks like the person holding the cup is wearing a real championship ring from their favorite team.

Licensed immediately by the University of Southern California, Blingware's fame was born from the love of USC fans at Saturday afternoon tailgates who wanted to commemorate their team's 11 NCAA National Championships.

After a short three weeks on the market, Blingware was chosen as the official media gift for Fox Sports at Super Bowl LI.

"Our cup is heavy. It's substantial. It feels like it will last through a lifetime of

tailgate parties," said Merten, founder and CEO of Edge Innovations.

Blingware is a hit. Merten, who procured 14 NCAA licensing rights in the first year alone, so far distributes to 20 college teams. He recently received licensing rights from the NBA and the NHL. He is in current talks with the NFL and Major League Baseball.

Blingware is made in America at Edge's Torrance, Calif., headquarters, which makes it ideal as a "hot-market" product for companies such as Fanatics.

"Blingware is the perfect hot-market, on-demand championship commemorative product that fans can order immediately after their favorite team wins a championship," Merten said. "We process our cups at our California facility as soon as the game is over and send them out the next morning. Absolutely no lag time."

The possibilities are endless. Edge Innovations has other products in the

development pipeline, starting with a double-walled Blingware travel mug. Merten is also working on in-venue retail placement in stadiums nationwide. A concept for stadium concessions is currently in development. BlingPRO, which will be sold in stadiums, will be part of a "Buy the beer, keep the cup" promotional gift-with-purchase campaign and priced accordingly. BlingPRO can be utilized for special edition championship commemorative programming.

"We're a 'good-time' product. We want fans to have fun, to get excited, to have something memorable. Three years ago, I was at sports trade shows and everything looked like more of the same. There was nothing different," said Merten. "I always say we are officially licensed and officially loved. It's great to see fans enjoy such a great product. I came up with this idea that is so simple, it's stupid, and it's awesome because fans love it. It truly is 'Stupid-Awesome!'" ■



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