



MOVE TO EMIRATES STADIUM IS THE CATALYST FOR IMPLEMENTING CRM AT ARSENAL FC

The construction of Emirates Stadium is a huge milestone for Arsenal Football Club. The club will make a small move down the road from Highbury but it is determined to make a huge leap in its approach to customer relationship management, underpinned by Ascent CRM for Sport from CIBER UK.

A World Class ambition for CRM

In Autumn 2006, Arsenal will play their first home match at the new 60,000 seat Emirates Stadium. The new venue will be one of the best sporting arenas in the world and a landmark piece of architecture dominating the North London skyline. The move presents Arsenal with some major opportunities but also some significant challenges, both financial and logistical, but is seen as the foundation on which to build the future success of the Club. The Arsenal board recognised that the stadium move could act as a catalyst for change and a fantastic opportunity for the club to completely revolutionise the way it interacts with its customers at all levels.





The Emirates Stadium

With the club investing £357million pounds in the stadium development, there is a greater requirement to maximise all revenue streams to support this investment. As a result the club embarked upon a significant project to enhance the way it interacts with all customers from supporters to corporate partners. At the heart of this revolution is Ascent for Sport, the CRM solution from CIBER UK.

“We have a duty of care, to shareholders, partners and customers, to make sure we maximise the utilisation and the revenues from Emirates Stadium which is a wonderful facility. To do this successfully, we recognised that the club had to undergo some cultural and process changes and to invest in technology to support that transformation”, explains Adrian Ford, Commercial Director of Arsenal.

“We will have a world class facility and we must have a world class approach to delivering the best possible level of service to our customers into the future.”

“We enlisted the help of three key partners to help us; Microsoft has provided us with a huge amount of support, advising on our investment in the right technology for the future, whilst specialist marketing consultancy, Sports Alliance, has provided major assistance in scoping and implementing the technology through their project and data management skills. Technology provider CIBER UK, has also brought invaluable expertise through their Ascent CRM solution and their experience of other sports and leisure organisations. The combined contribution of these partners makes us very confident that we now have the platform in place to achieve that world class ambition and we are already starting to see the results.”

A single voice talking to each customer

Arsenal had a key vision for customer interaction into the future. They wanted a single, centralised information system that would unify all customer data from all systems and sources within the club. As Angus Kinnear, Marketing Manager explains. “To anyone outside football, the move from a 38,000 seater stadium to a modern 60,000 seater facility may seem simple. But it’s extremely complex. Emirates Stadium will be a major leisure venue three times the size of Highbury with a completely new range of facilities. The two key challenges are selling the full inventory of these facilities and successfully migrating supporters from Highbury to Emirates.

“The move represents a major step up. Currently the club only has to focus upon managing the 38,000 people who turn up to the match each week. Demand exceeds supply at Highbury and beyond the match day seats the size of the stadium limits the products and services we can offer. For example, unlike many of the modern sports venues, Highbury has limited corporate hospitality and conference facilities. At the Emirates Stadium, we will be adding an array of new products and services from our Club Level Seats and Executive Boxes to an enormous Conference and Banqueting suites with the capacity for 1000 delegate conferences simultaneously.”

“To be effective in our communications to all of the different customer segments we needed to unify our information and make sure that it was centralised and available for use in a co-ordinated manner. Previously, the club’s approach to data management lacked co-ordination with different departments in different parts of the ground working from different data systems, none of which were integrated. The Club’s interaction with its customers was not optimal but we could still function effectively, however success in the new world would have been impossible if we continued as we were.”

As a result, Arsenal has now brought all of its customer data together into Ascent so that there is one single repository. This will ultimately include the integration of data from their other key information systems. This includes the VenueMaster2 ticketing system that is used to manage ticket and membership sales, the ProLogix retail system, which will be used at point of sale in retail and a new hospitality system with 250 tills. The Fortress access control system that manages audience access and the Sage Line 500 financial management system will also be integrated.

“As a result, all information relating to every aspect of a customer’s relationship with us will be available to all departments. This will enable every Arsenal employee to be customer facing and provide the club with the ability to analyse, learn from, and use our customer data to enhance our communication even further in the future” says Kinnear.

An Early Return on Investment

As this vision of a unified customer solution comes into being, there is no doubt in the minds of the Arsenal Executive that it will deliver a major return on investment, especially when the club is in situ at the Emirates Stadium. As Angus emphasises, the new CRM focus, aided by the technology is already supporting some crucial initiatives in the run up to the move.

One of the key projects underway is the promotion and sale of Premium Level seats. As he explains, “Situated on two tiers, these comprise one tier of 150 Executive Boxes and 8 rows of Club Level seats at the same tier as the Directors’ box. These 9000 seats offer the best sight lines in the stadium and enjoy a separate access from General Admission Ticket Holders as well as excellent access to a range of luxurious, bars, restaurants and lounges. Aimed at corporate customers, they offer a scalable hospitality solution from the large organisation that wants to host lots of customers and employees to the businessman who wants to enjoy a game with a key customer, family member or friend.”

The economics of the Premium Level seats are significant too. At around £31m per annum, these 9,000 seats alone will contribute the same annual ticketing income as the whole of Highbury does currently. As you might expect, Angus and his team have been working hard already to secure customers.

“With the help of Sports Alliance, we worked to identify and compile a large database of potential customers, comprising over 50,000 companies and we have been using Ascent CRM to help us target these customers. This is done through a team of 10 customer management agents in our outsourced contact centre and an in house sales team of eight. Initial direct marketing has been used to promote the Premium Level seats and the contact centre has been generating appointments. Ascent CRM is being used to automate the sales process by recording all of our dialogues with potential customers and tracking the progress of each. We can also compliment the contact centre communications with e-mail marketing campaigns to help stimulate further interest from people who have made an initial enquiry.

“A year before Stadium opening we have already sold all 150 boxes and 75% of Club Level seats. The contact centre has already generated over 1000 appointments across the next 3 months, we believe that we will sell our full inventory by April 2006, four months ahead of our original target.”

This process also builds for the future and will help Arsenal manage a situation that it has never really experienced before. “Supply could not meet demand at Highbury so we have never really had to worry about attrition”. However, Angus is well aware that there may be some churn for these packages and this is where the system will be of even more use into the future. “As we conduct the marketing process, we are starting to build up even more information about the potential customers for the Premium Seats and this means that we can continue to market to them all year around. Through the Ascent CRM system, we can ensure that we have a strong list of potential candidates to buy any packages that become available year on year as well as cross selling the conference and banqueting opportunities”.

But Arsenal is not just using the CRM system to augment its premium customers’ experience. Perhaps the biggest project of all is the migration of all current season ticket holders and members. The club currently has some 22,000 current season ticket holders, 68,000 members with a variety of ticketing rights and over 30,000 supporters on a season ticket waiting list. With 13 different levels of ticketing entitlement for their current memberships, the club was determined that each existing and potential new member would receive a personalised approach, ensuring that they understood the process and received the precise ticket that they were entitled to. “We purpose built a Reservations Centre to manage this process and Ascent, under the management of Sports Alliance, is the engine that drives it by coordinating the contact, appointment setting and follow up. This involves placing our entire membership database in priority order and then inviting them in for a sales appointment one by one. Our aim is to ensure that if a fan has been sitting at Highbury for twenty years in an upper tier, row one, aisle seat, (next to his best mate) he will receive an equivalent seat at Emirates.”

Another example of how the CRM system will support a multitude of campaigns and communication programmes is the promotion of the Highbury Square properties. This high quality development is being constructed within the structure of the current art deco stadium and will comprise 711 flats and apartments from studios to penthouse suites. Once again, the club has been able to use Ascent CRM to help promote an open day and launch for these properties. Adrian Ford commented, “By profiling and segmenting our database effectively, the first property direct mail to just under 3,000 fans generated sales of over £30million.”

An associated benefit of the Ascent implementation is that Arsenal’s database has much more value to corporate partners Angus Kinnear added, “As opposed to giving our partners access to a list of names, we can now provide them with a carefully profiled and segmentable database which can deliver tangible value to their business. Because it allows them to accurately and appropriately target our fans with affinity offerings”.



Summary

In the short time that Arsenal has implemented the system they are already starting to taste some of the benefits that they can expect on an even wider basis in the future. Angus believes that they have come a long way already. "We wanted to change our marketing and customer service approach and elevate it into a league that matches our new home and our ambition. The technology is beginning to provide us with a much more integrated understanding of our customers, both current and future. I have no doubt that as we move into 2006 and occupy our new home, we will look back and realise that what we are doing now was crucial to our success."

Microsoft: Supporting Sport and Leisure

Arsenal has achieved its integrated solution using software applications built on Microsoft product technology. The Ascent CRM solution, for example, is built to harness the Microsoft .NET Framework which offers easy deployment and low cost of ownership as well as strong integration and interoperability with other applications that conform to the framework. Use of Microsoft's SQL Server database provides powerful data accessibility and management whilst Microsoft BizTalk Server facilitates data integration and synchronisation between the different applications in use at the club.

Key objectives with the Ascent CRM system

Unify all customer data from other major systems in the club to provide one single view of all customer data including:-

- Sage Line 500 accounts
- ProLogix Retail Systems
- Venuemaster 2 Ticketing and Membership
- Fortress Access Control
- Stadium Tours System
- Arsenal Website

Enable all staff to be customer facing and to talk with one single voice to the customer

Support the interactive communication with all types of customer using multiple channels from call centre to integrated e-mail

Allow the management of complex relationships with sponsors and corporate partners

Manage the sales and marketing of all major initiatives including:-

- Migration of all current season ticket holders onto their new package within the Emirates stadium through the Arsenal Reservations Centre
- Promotion and sales of Club Level Seats and Executive boxes to corporate and key individual clients
- Sales and marketing of the Highbury Square apartments
- Promotion and Sales of conferencing and hospitality suites at the Emirates Stadium
- Affinity marketing with sponsors

