



Bolton's Reebok Stadium: customer relationship management can help supporters out of their armchairs

CRM scores with Bolton Wanderers

'THERE'S no point in having a CRM philosophy if you don't have the right tools - the right people, processes and systems,' says Gareth Moores, commercial director at Bolton Wanderers Football Club.

'CRM isn't just about database marketing systems or clever marketing activities - it's about every interaction you have with your customer.'

Bolton is a Premier League club that embarked on its CRM journey about 3 years ago. While it needed to compete with the bigger Premiership clubs, its fan base was smaller, which meant it wouldn't be able to generate enough money from football alone. It had to find new revenue streams.

'We command a loyalty in football that the Coca Colas of this world can only dream of, but some people say that you don't have to work to maintain it because the fans will remain loyal no matter what,' says Moores.

'But if you treat your customers badly and give them a bad experience, they'll remain loyal to the brand, but they'll do it from the comfort of their armchairs, which doesn't maximise revenues.'

The club introduced its CRM strategy in the shape of a smartcard-based system from TeamCard, which it piloted during the 2000-2001 season, and went live the following season. The aim was to ensure access to the stadium was more secure and efficient, but more importantly, it became the basis of a company loyalty scheme.

Fans use the card to obtain points not only for buying tickets or club merchandise, but for buying goods and services in High Street chains such as Sainsbury, Allders and Toni and Guy. These points can be redeemed at the club for tickets, goods or hospitality at the stadium hotel, which is run in association with the De Vere hotel group.

Project profile

Company	Bolton Wanderers Football Club
Implementation	Teamcard smartcard systems/ Strand Technology's Team Notes datawarehouse
Problems	Needed to find new income streams
Lessons learned	CRM is about people, processes and IT systems and involves continuous improvement

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'The loyalty scheme has generated significant revenues for us and has delivered a return on investment in two years. About a third of our income is generated from non-football activity. Three years ago, 97-98 per cent came from football,' says Moores.

The next step was to introduce a datawarehouse from TeamNotes to consolidate customer data held in disparate systems across the business.

The aim was to understand customers better to provide goods and services geared to their requirements and improve marketing campaigns.

'CRM is a process of continuous improvement and you can't implement in overnight,' says Moores.

'It's about changing the culture of the business and instilling a customer philosophy throughout the organisation. For us, it's been very much a staged process, rather than a big bang - we're spending a lot of money on this, and it can be a costly mistake if you get it wrong.'