
From CRM to FRM: Applying CRM in the football industry

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Garry Adamson

is Managing Director of the management consultancy Adamson Solutions. He recently qualified with distinction in the Football Industries MBA course at the University of Liverpool, and has a degree in business studies. He can be contacted at garrya@adamsonsolutions.co.uk

Warwick Jones

is Dean at the Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK.

Alan Tapp

is Reader in Marketing at Bristol Business School. He has published over 35 articles in leading journals and international conferences as well as a best-selling textbook. Much of his research has been sponsored by organisations, for example IBM, Christian Dior and The Chartered Institute of Marketing. He is on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*. He has undertaken research, consultancy and training for organisations as diverse as the NSPCC, The Institute of Direct Marketing, National Centre for Educational Technology, Business Strategies Ltd, The Royal Mail (now Consignia), The CIM, IBM and Coventry City Football Club. He is the author of 'Principles of Direct and Database Marketing', now in its second edition.

Abstract In this paper, the authors develop a conceptual and implementation framework for 'fan relationship management' (FRM) that learns from the successes and failures of conventional customer relationship management (CRM) but considers the special nature of football. Although often not explicitly described as such, in reality most CRM is a mixture of transaction and relationship marketing, often leaning towards the former. Here, the authors examine the current state of CRM implementation within the football industry based on information collected from football club business managers. Based on existing knowledge about supporter behaviour the notion of FRM is developed. The authors believe that FRM provides an appropriate balance between transaction and relationship approaches. The paper discusses the football industry's approach to CRM and includes an in-depth case study into one football club's attempt to implement CRM. These results suggest that the football industry may be replicating mistakes already made by mainstream business sectors, reinforcing the need for FRM.

THE NEED FOR CRM IN FOOTBALL

The football industry lags behind other industries in implementing customer relationship management CRM techniques and so it has 'follower' advantages in learning from mistakes made elsewhere. There are, however, crucial differences in football compared with conventional businesses; as a result

the classic CRM models that have been much discussed in the literature need to be adapted for such a specialist sector.^{1,3}

The unique characteristics of the sport and its fans need consideration when developing or implementing CRM techniques. As a result, a new CRM framework which applies learning from other industries and considers the

Warwick Jones
Dean
Bristol Business School,
University of the West of
England, Frenchay Campus,
Bristol, BS16 1QY
Tel: +44 (0)117 344 3439
e-mail:
warwick.jones@uwe.ac.uk

specificity of sport, is required for football clubs. In this paper, the authors develop a conceptual framework, called 'fan relationship management' (FRM) and examine how the current reality compares with theory.

The notion that building relationships with customers increases their loyalty has been, at least in theory, one of the core aims of CRM strategies.³ Within football, loyalty levels are assumed to be much greater than in conventional industries and this has led to an (erroneous) belief by most clubs that they can take their fans' loyalty for granted. These beliefs persist and football clubs have often been accused of ignoring the needs of fans⁴ and abusing their 'perverse loyalty and fanaticism'.⁵ Relatively few clubs are aware of the small but growing body of literature that challenges the conventional wisdom that supporter loyalty is 'a given'. Recent studies have highlighted different segments of football fans that, for example, are not loyal to one team, or may be attitudinally loyal but not behaviourally loyal.^{6,7} Tapp's 2004 work suggests that for some fans a relationship building approach may be appropriate in supporter retention, while for other types of fans transaction marketing may be profitable.⁸ Hence, a segmented approach enabled by CRM should pay dividends.

In this paper an in-depth case study of CRM in one club is used to highlight important theoretical and implementation issues. But CRM is not a precise concept and definitions of CRM are inconsistent. Hence the next section defines CRM as the authors believe it should be defined for the spectator sports industry.

CRM IN SPORT

From an academic point of view, it would not be unfair to describe CRM as

a rather ill-defined, misunderstood and, indeed, unproven concept. CRM developed from the need to consolidate a wide body of thought into a manageable term that inevitably became an acronym.⁹ While academics have concentrated on the theoretical development of relationship marketing, in the commercial world, CRM originated from IT-led solutions to the problem of channel integration with a little bit of direct and database marketing added in. More recently, management consultancies have earned considerable sums introducing firms to the idea of CRM as a way of delivering company-wide market orientation strategies.

Figure 1 summarises the evolution of CRM from a channel integrator to a fully fledged driver of relationship marketing.

In most respects this evolution mirrors much of what is taking place at present within the football industry. The biggest clubs — Chelsea, Arsenal, Manchester United — have reasonably sophisticated channel management systems with, for example, telephone bureaux taking inbound enquires and making outbound sales calls. Websites are set up to allow fans chat facilities and contact with the club, though reply times and quality may be variable. Sports franchises across the spectrum have been transformed by ticketing systems that allow easy sales of match day tickets — with the functionality to capture supporter data.

Apart from season ticket reminders and merchandise sales pitches, however, few proactive communications tend to take place. Most football clubs including those mentioned above, concentrate on transaction marketing at the expense of relationship marketing. Exceptions include Charlton Athletic, Norwich City and Ipswich Town — all 'community' clubs that attempt to create a more cosy

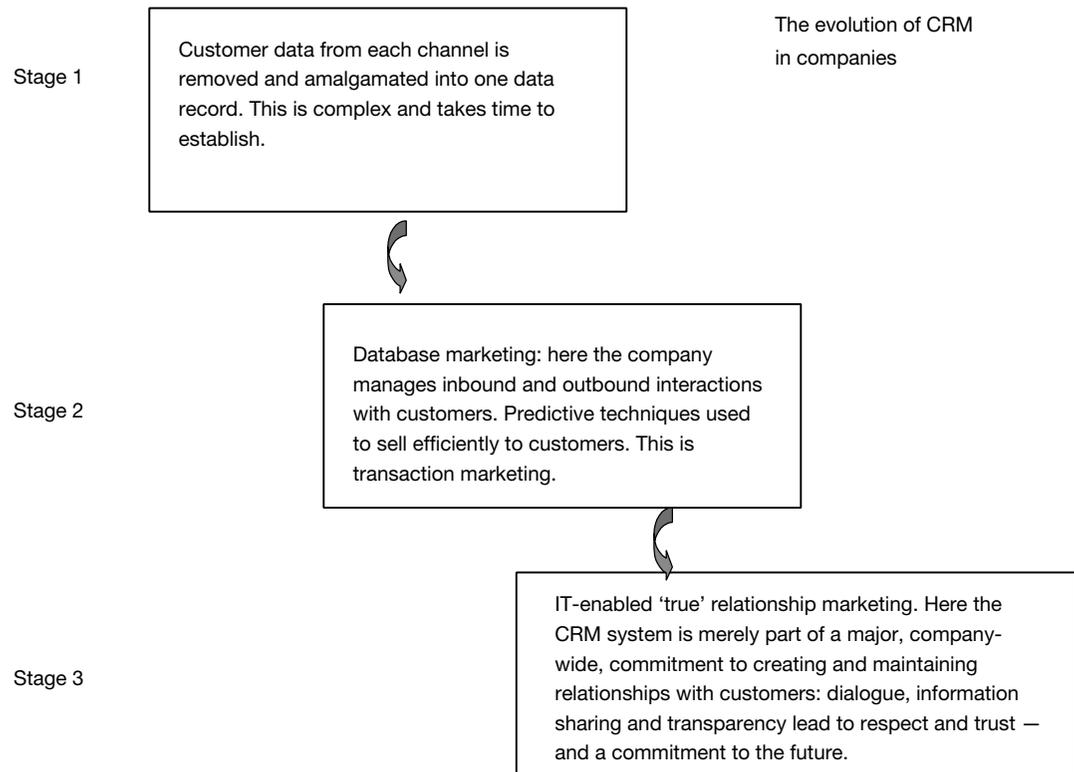


Figure 1: The evolution of CRM in companies

atmosphere. These clubs will reward loyal fans with, for example, free transport to selected away fixtures. But these are exceptions: most clubs pay little attention to the central tenets of relationship marketing: dialogue, trust and mutual respect. Gronroos, a key figure in the development of the theory of relationship marketing (RM), would supplement these with 'shared ideals', 'mutual benefit', and a 'commitment to continue the relationship'.¹⁰ For Gronroos, relationship marketing is more than a set of activities and more, even, than a 'strategy' for the firm. For him it is the very essence of business: a philosophy that is deeply held by all in the company, placing a commitment to its customers higher than maximising short term profits.¹¹ However, Gronroos observed that relationship marketing is often done in a very superficial way —

and implementation is often unsuccessful because the firm sees RM as a strategic option to be tested, rather than as a set of enduring beliefs that will shape all aspects of the business.

Some elements of the CRM armoury apply more strongly to sport than others. The importance of supporter loyalty and supporter segmentation has already been mentioned. Segmentation by customer value (in this sector by asking how much fans are worth to the business through their lifetime) has been identified by some writers and practitioners (notably Gamble *et al.*)¹² as extremely important.

Other aspects of CRM may apply only as optional refinements rather than as core delivery, however. For instance, the thinking behind 1:1 marketing — treating customers as individuals — comes up against the desire of supporters to be seen as a group: they see

themselves as 'we' rather than 'I'. Another issue is service. Much, notably within sports management literature, has been made of service delivery in sports contexts, answering ticket office phones promptly, good quality food, stadia facilities and so on. Little research has been done in UK-based sport spectating. One can hypothesise that more 'casual' fans (those who see football attendance as a form of entertainment rather than tribal worship) may indeed place a higher priority on the service-scape, but less evidence abounds that hardened supporters are particularly concerned.

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTATION

There is evidence of a high rate of failure within conventional business attempts at implementing CRM. A key problem has been firms installing CRM applications software without being clear what the aims are. At the heart of the confusion endemic in CRM implementation lies the transaction-relationship marketing dialectic. In other words, are firms primarily interested in using CRM tools for better targeting, creating propositions, selling directly and avoiding wasting marketing budget? Or, do they want to generate a two way dialogue, give up market power to customers, make and keep long term commitments and nurture that most precious of commodities, trust? One may summarise the present position (and not just in sports-related sectors), perhaps rather cynically, as one of 'talking the talk' of relationships, but 'walking the walk' of transaction marketing.

In most sectors, practitioners are by and large struggling to get past the first stages of CRM. Just aligning the channels properly so that a common view of the customer could be obtained

across them was found to be hard, difficult work.¹³ Spotting and co-ordinating tactical selling initiatives is typically the next stage of CRM development for firms. As so often happens, cross sell dominates the business case for investment. Nothing wrong with this perhaps, but it's as yet a long way from the ethos of 'learn and grow together', building trust and nurturing relationships. With few exceptions, the latter remain a pipe dream. Yet if there is one sector where the ethos of relationships should work well, it is surely professional sport.

Having briefly introduced CRM and made a start in applying it to sports franchises, it is now time to develop a more complete conceptual framework for CRM in football.

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR CRM IN THE FOOTBALL SECTOR

A model that takes account of the unique nature of football as a business, and the special nature of its customers: the 'fan' is proposed. Figure 2 summarises the conceptual underpinning of CRM in sports franchises.

The authors argue that the primary initial strategic platform for sports club CRM is segmentation. Segmenting works well when there is considerable heterogeneity in the customer base — something that will be demonstrated here. The gathering and organising of the supporter transaction and characteristics data that CRM demands for its channel integration and direct marketing activities allows a variety of segmentation approaches. Supporters may be split by their differing value to the club, their differing loyalty, their differing psychological and physical needs from the club and their geodemographic characteristics. Hunt *et al.* suggest a number types of sports

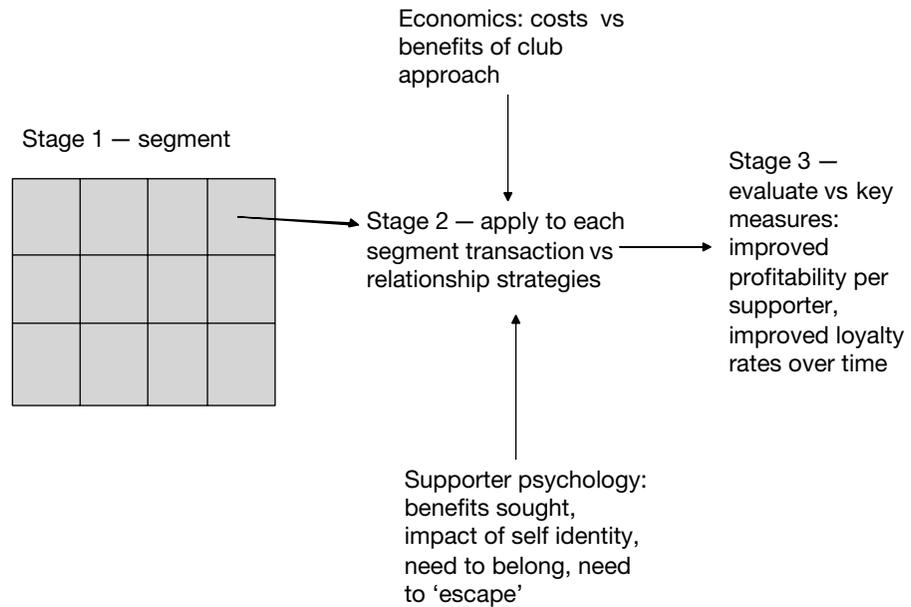


Figure 2: The conceptual underpinning of CRM in sports franchises

Table 1: A typology of fan characteristics (based on Hunt *et al.*)¹⁵

| Type of fan | Characteristics |
|--------------------|---|
| The temporary fan | A fan for a specific period who reverts back to normal patterns of behaviour |
| The local fan | This fan’s motivation for supporting a sports team, event or player is geographically based, suggesting that if this person moved to another area then the original identification with the team would significantly reduce |
| The devoted fan | Remains loyal to the team despite time or geographical boundaries |
| Fanatical fans | Almost obsessive type of support of a team or individual, but where at least one aspect of their lives provides identification that is stronger than being a fan |
| Dysfunctional fans | Those individuals who gain their main source of self identification from their object of support. Hooligans reside in this category. |

fan, albeit from a US perspective (Table 1).

From a UK football perspective, the Tapp and Clowes study remains the only major study of UK football supporters.¹⁶ Figure 3 summarises the key segments, mapped here in two dimensions: supporter benefits and supporter behavioural commitment.

In Figure 3, the vertical axis illustrates the importance of the priority that different groups of supporters place on their team winning versus the entertainment provided by the game. For example, less committed fans would be quite content with a 3–3

scoreline, while die-hard fanatics would rather a 1–0 win for their team. The horizontal axis highlights the differing commitment of different groups to the club. Within the ‘casual’, supporter segment were ‘carefree casuals’ who made their buying decision based on convenience and entertainment rather than winning. These casual fans don’t have the same emotional links with football as the traditional hard core supporters. They go to football to have a good day out, but they could just as easily switch to something else.

At the other extreme, ‘fanatics’ have the deepest connection to the club. They

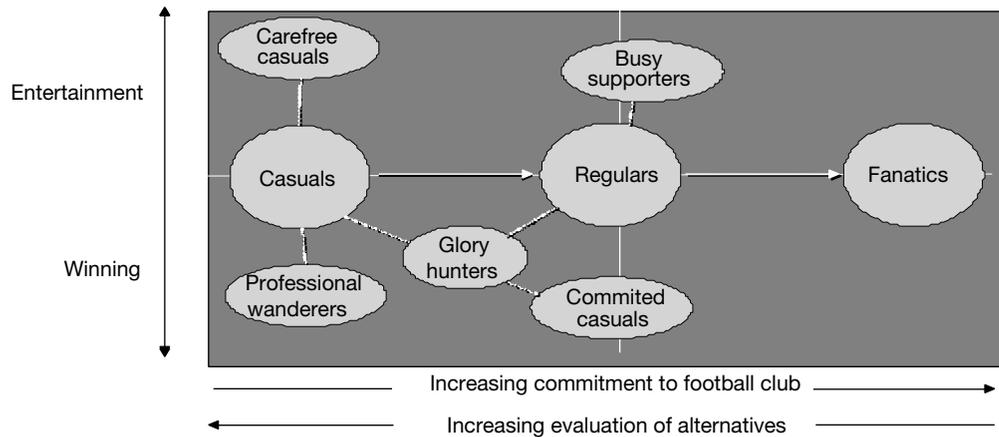


Figure 3: Segmentation methods based on attitude to type of team performance and commitment to the club

also split into two main groups, those who had a strong identification with the club itself (club lovers) and those with a deep passion for football generally (football lovers). Overlaying commitment and attitudes to football-as-entertainment are a series of important layers of psychology that are common to different groups of supporters. Fans are very different from customers of conventional businesses,^{17,18} after all as Taylor says: ‘No one has their ashes scattered down the aisle of Tesco’.¹⁹

For many, if not most, football represents an important safety valve; an escape from everyday life. Football supporters have dreams, hopes and desires for their team that may depart from the reality of their team’s performance. For these reasons, supporters often resent commercial ‘intrusion’ into their relationship with the team. Fans may identify with their team’s success by basking in reflected glory (BIRGing)²⁰ or may identify with perennial struggles by ‘underdogging’.²⁰ Some (though not many) fans may place such importance on success as part of their self image that they will switch allegiance.²² More commonly, if a team is losing regularly fans will drift away in a

rather passive manner, and cease actively supporting their club, at least for a while.²³

Stage 2 in Figure 2 refers to the club’s need to react to the identified needs of supporters and balance these with the economic needs of the club to organise a mixed transaction–relationship delivery, depending on the segment. More ‘casual’ fans are less interested in relationships, may be happy to be sold to and expect an economic transaction — entertainment — in return for payment. The culture of most clubs is predisposed to this kind of arms length approach. What needs much more development is the ‘relationship’ approach demanded by committed fans. They may feel a strong sense of ownership (it’s our club), of wishing to actively input into the club or of craving recognition for their loyalty. Less sympathetically, they may demand on-field success and are likely to drift away if this is not achieved.

Stage 3 of Figure 2 — measurement against primary objectives — is logical but, as with so many industries, football clubs rarely this put into practice beyond basic profit/loss measures. Measures made on a per supporter basis are still very rare.

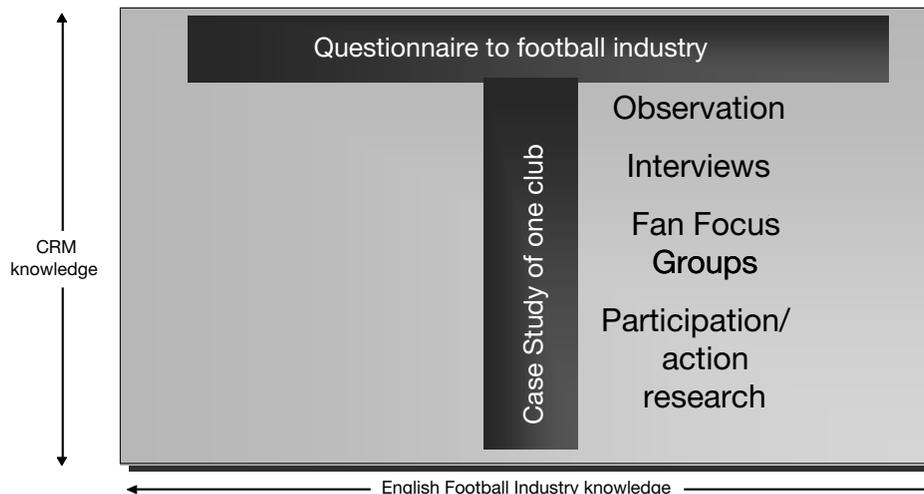


Figure 4: Summary of primary research

METHODOLOGY: CASE STUDY – ‘ALBION’ FC

Figure 4 summarises the primary research undertaken for this work

Having written to all 92 English league clubs, meetings were secured with 11 of them to discuss the issue of CRM. During one of these meetings, the Chief Executive of ‘Albion’ FC (a Championship League club whose name has been changed to preserve confidentiality) offered one of the authors the opportunity of spending ten weeks working within the club during the implementation of a new ticketing system leading to the development of CRM. Researchers commonly have problems negotiating access and this was, therefore, an excellent opportunity.²⁴ ‘Albion’ FC requested that the research period included the provision of support and advice to the club.

The data gathering process included exploratory and explanatory informal interviews with club management, observations over a 10 week period, frequent participation in meetings and, most crucially, personal participation as a member of the CRM implementation

project team. This allowed first hand insights into both the everyday issues and more strategic problems associated with the implementation. During this period, three focus groups involving Albion FC fans were also completed.

Other data

To supplement the case study data, questionnaires were sent out to all 92 English league football clubs. 25 completed questionnaires was returned, representing 27 per cent of the total. The response rate is adequate but, given the low absolute size of the sample, the authors do not regard the results as giving any more than a semi-quantitative ‘feel’ for CRM in football landscape and would advise interpreting the results with some care. As mentioned previously, to ensure that the questions were less open to interpretation, the survey focussed on understanding the use of the tangible aspects of CRM, such as segmentation and database marketing techniques. It was felt inappropriate to survey organisational and cultural aspects in questionnaire format, though there were opportunities for respondents to express

their views regarding this subject in specifically designed open questions. Of those clubs who responded, ten came from The Championship (the second of four divisions) and five each from the three other three leagues, including The Premiership. The survey is included in Appendix 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Survey Results – a snapshot of CRM in English professional football clubs

Though small, the questionnaire sample was reasonably representative of English football clubs. Among the 25 clubs that responded, the average annual income was approximately £17.5m, slightly lower than the overall average of £19.77m reported for the 2002/3 season.²⁵ The sample represented a wide range of average attendances ranging from 2,300 to 43,500. The number of non-player employees within the clubs ranged between seven and 200.

In total, 23 clubs (92 per cent of the sample) had appointed either a chief executive or managing director; 52 per cent have a marketing manager or director and 84 per cent said that they had a commercial manager or director. There is an increasing awareness of the benefits of general business disciplines, but clearly the discipline of marketing still has some way to go. Indeed one cannot necessarily assume that these people have the relevant marketing skills. Moreover, club 'marketing managers' often have a brief to sell to commercial clients rather than market the club to ordinary fans.

Questions were asked about clubs' abilities to undertake core CRM activities: 72 per cent said that they had the ability to perform queries on customer data. Interestingly, 40 per cent

of the surveyed group claimed to use segmentation techniques, which may suggest a certain level of sophistication in their database marketing approaches. Our observations and conversations with club managers, however, reinforces Tapp's and Clowe's view that 'segmentation' is merely the separation of season ticket holders and members on the database — with limited subsequent marketing beyond ticket transactions.²⁶ Nine out of 25 clubs did not have any CRM capacity whatsoever. Nearly all these clubs pleaded poverty: note that the smallest professional clubs have turnovers of about #1m or less and lack resources and critical mass for CRM investments.

Finally, comments were invited through an open space. Many comments reflected good levels of education about the need for CRM for efficient transaction marketing, less so for relationship building or the importance of loyalty. In summary, while basic progress is clearly being made, the roll out of CRM in football is patchy and high-end activities such as relationship building seem very rare. What was not clear was the extent to which well-educated managers penetrated clubs, or what the adverse pressures placed on marketers were. These will be considered in more detail in the case study of 'Albion' FC.

'Albion' FC – A case study of implementing CRM

'Albion' FC is typical of many Championship, lower Premiership and higher League One teams. It has typical crowds of just under 20,000 with a capacity a little larger than this. It sells up to 40,000 tickets for one-off big games such as championship play offs. The latter suggests a considerable 'casual' fan base.

At the beginning of 2004, 'Albion' FC

decided to replace all of its current IT systems with an enterprise-wide modular solution. This product included ticketing systems, corporate sales, merchandising and a CRM module. The implementation of these new systems began in 2004. The club had strategic aims to develop the brand and image of the club. The decision to implement a CRM system appeared to be part of an aspiration to replace the out-of-date IT infrastructure, however. In terms of the database marketing, the benefits of having a CRM system were understood but this appeared to be the secondary consideration. This was compounded by the lack of an investment appraisal regarding the new system and, as a result, there was no return on investment (ROI) expectation. The Finance Director led the project, while the sourcing process for the CRM module was managed by the IT Manager and Ticket Office Manager who both worked for the Finance Director. These executives also formed the project team (which also included the Sales and Marketing Manager) — this gave a noticeable skew in favour of the operational and functional aspects of the project. As a result the project tended to be technology- rather than customer-led. At a later date, this issue was highlighted and some strategic objectives were developed including an aim regularly to fill the stadium within five years based on the same league position. This helped to refocus the project team but in a sense this was too little too late: the focus now was based on the functionality of the system rather than needs of the business.

One of the problems that stemmed from a poor planning phase was the lack of consideration of either supporter or employee needs or interests. There were no plans to consider the different customer touch points to ensure a

consistent service or how employees should be rewarded for new behaviours. There were no customer service measures in place and therefore employees could not determine the levels of service given. For example, there were no measures to record telephone waiting times, the number of calls taken by the ticket office or a simple log of the reasons for calls.

There was very little communication between management and staff, which left staff confused and demotivated. Staff in the biggest customer facing area — the ticket office — had no formal CRM training and there were no plans to change the organisation to reflect the new practices that were required from them. They were not consulted, advised or involved in any project issues and policy decisions were made without their awareness. Fans were regularly frustrated at the lack of consistency between what was communicated by the club and what they were told by ticket office staff. The potentially vital data being collected through fan telephone calls was not fed back to the Ticket Office Manager or back office functions such as sales and marketing.

This lack of appropriate project management was demonstrated following an attempted intervention to ensure these issues were considered. The Ticket Office Manager objected on the grounds that CRM should only be considered after the ticketing system was implemented. There was a functional approach to working which restricted the information flows between the customer and back office functions and severely restricted the ability to develop an integrated approach. Departments did not communicate effectively with each other and generally considered other departments as insignificant in the fulfilment of their own functional roles.

A supporter group at 'Albion' was informed about the systems changes once the sourcing decision had taken place. This apart, supporters were not consulted about the CRM strategy in order to understand their needs or concerns. The new ticketing system would be used to collect data about fans as they purchased tickets or joined as members, however, there was no consideration of what information should be collected in the ticketing system and a significant disregard for the fact that the CRM database would eventually be populated by data from the ticketing system (and others). The club had actually decided to scrap its old customer database in order to develop a new clean version so that it could improve its direct marketing activities. This data would be collected by the ticket office staff via telephone, application form or internet. A lack of consideration of the type of data required, and how it would be used, led to disastrous results. Staff did not collect information in a consistent way, resulting in approximately 10 per cent of the new database being made up of duplications. Telephone numbers and addresses were entered incorrectly and names added without the correct capitalisation. The impact on future direct marketing initiatives through the CRM database, which relied on this data being correct, was often overlooked.

The actual launch of the ticketing system caused severe problems for supporters. There were significant issues as fans were left without tickets that had not been processed; many were forced to queue for periods of up to an hour. This caused bad publicity and rather than helping to build relationships with fans, it produced the opposite effect where any new initiatives would be significantly set back. Overall, it appeared that the club did not really see the fans as customers. Employees often saw fans as

'enemy figures', demonstrated by their venomous reactions to fan website messages. This source of interaction between customers on a website may be viewed by enlightened businesses as a valuable resource, but here was viewed with hostility by some senior managers and the Ticket Office Manager, as a result of personal attacks made on the site previously.

Database marketing

The CRM system gave the club the ability to segment fans and develop specific direct communications with targeted groups. This was not surprising due to the emphasis on the functionality of the system throughout the project. After the disastrous start, a separate team of four staff was formed, away from the ticket office, to cleanse the data and process member applications. This was a major success and, at the end of four weeks, all applications had been processed, the data had been cleansed and the number of telephone calls regarding problems had significantly reduced.

The CRM system sourced was a state of the art integrated system, which had all of the functionality required to enable effective CRM initiatives. The authors, however, would argue this was seen as the end in itself, and, as a result, too much focus was placed on the systems implementation. This led to many problems reinforced by the software provider who also framed the system as 'CRM' and provided no support for the non-systems aspects of CRM implementation. The club decided to utilise the functionality on the system simply because it existed; for example, a loyalty points system was implemented with little thought. The internet ticket booking channel also caused problems. The Internet Manager was not involved in the project and only once the new

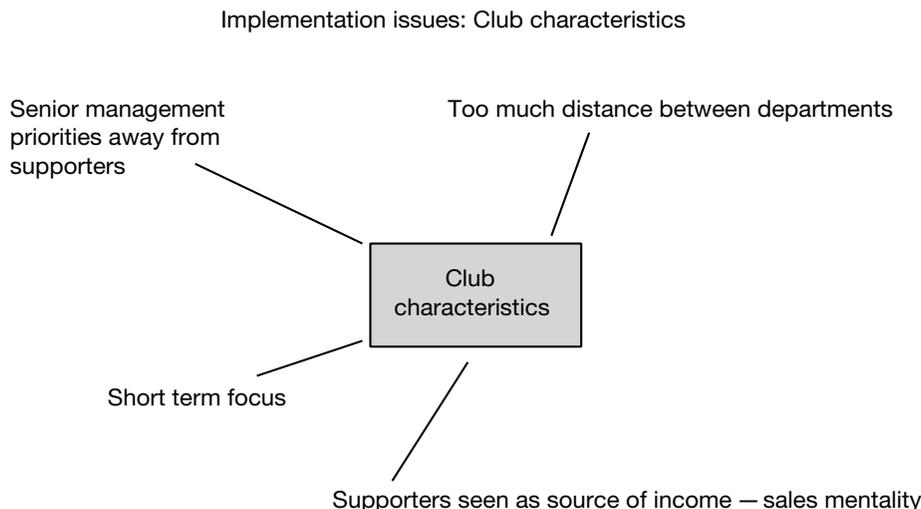


Figure 5: Summary of the major implementation problems

system had gone live did he get a chance to intervene. It was not user friendly, offered less availability to fans than the previous system and there were no instructions for logging into the system correctly. This subsequently caused a high volume of complaints through the ticket office, and staff who did not understand the issues involved generally gave incorrect advice or information as a result.

Implementation summary

Figure 5 summarises many of the major problems.

The CRM system had not been implemented at the end of the ten week placement period. During this time the club’s reputation had diminished within the fan base. Problems each match day were significant, as large numbers of fans had difficulty entering the stadium or buying tickets. There was confusion about how the loyalty scheme worked internally and externally, and staff were still working in the same manner as previously. Internally, staff did not fully understand the new loyalty scheme or ticket booking processes and incorrect information was regularly given to fans,

which caused further frustration. The problems were being tackled using a haphazard approach as there were no measures in place to highlight performance that would help identify the critical issues and root causes of problems. Ironically, a system which was intended to support the increase in the number of fans coming to the stadium possibly had the opposite effect. Fans were making regular complaints on websites, in local newspapers and in phone calls to the club.

Towards the end of the ten week placement, the participant author made a series of detailed recommendations to ‘Albion’ management. A new implementation model, ‘Fan Relationship Management’ was created (Figure 6). The authors regard this as an important diagnostic tool for football clubs to use as a template for CRM implementation.

CONCLUSION: LEARNING FROM THE MISTAKES – AN EXPERIENCE-BASED MODEL FOR CRM IN FOOTBALL CLUBS

The football industry is potentially a sector in which CRM would work well.

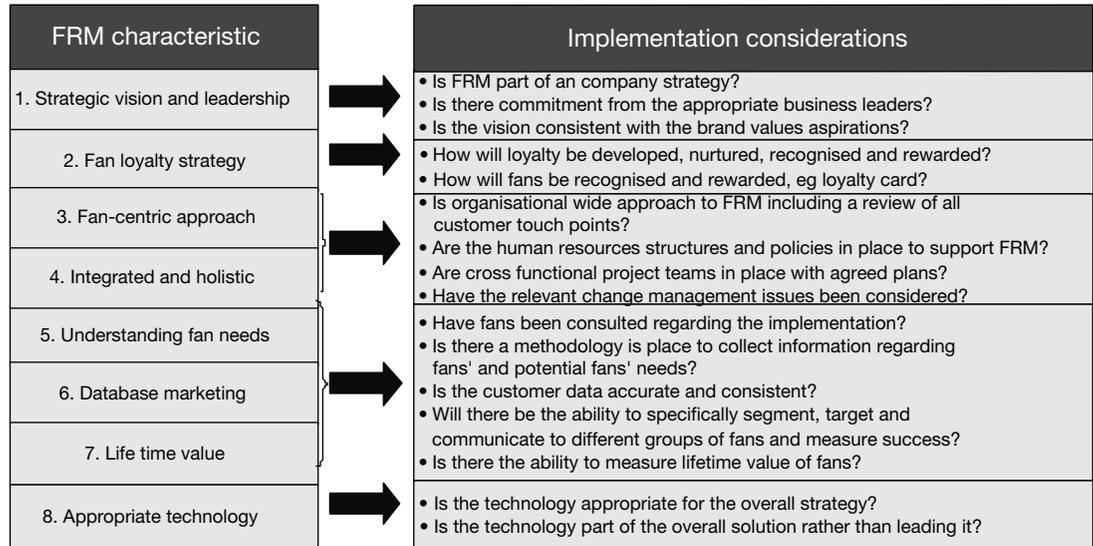


Figure 6: A ‘fan relationship marketing’ implementation tool for football clubs

The football industry in England has a progressive attitude towards the concept of CRM. Nearly all clubs surveyed here believed that CRM strategies are worthwhile, most have implemented database marketing techniques and the majority of the remainder plan to do so. The industry has new challenges in the modern era because fans have more leisure choices and are more discerning in terms of their service expectations. Clubs have become more commercially focused and are beginning to show signs of the development of conventional business approaches. Traditionally, it has been difficult to maintain contact with their fan bases, but the development of new technology means that this has become a possibility. Historically, fans have not been treated as customers in that the quality of the service they have received has been poor.

The special nature of football and its fans means that different emphases are required in order to develop a framework of successful CRM. Some supporter segments are more loyal than commercial customers, but have different levels of loyalty that need to be

understood. They like to be involved with the club and characteristically they have many more differing needs from football due to the emotional nature of the game. The football industry needs to understand that supporters need to be treated like customers but recognised as fans.

Turning to CRM implementation, one can see that the football industry is lagging behind conventional businesses in employing CRM; rather than enjoying the benefits of being a ‘follower’ — in terms of the opportunity to learn from other industries — it gives the appearance of starting from scratch. In this research, the authors found a lack of awareness within clubs of what CRM actually is, which was re-enforced by their software providers’ sales techniques, project support and guidance. The case study featured here highlights the following specific learning points.

- Don’t allow the project to be ‘hi-jacked’ by finance/IT. Technology was (wrongly) seen as the solution, and the decision to implement CRM was part of an IT project rather than a

customer-focused strategy. Leadership of the project came from the Finance Director with input from the IT Manager and Ticket Office Manager (who both worked for the Finance Director). These people also formed the project team which, while it included the Sales and Marketing Manager, nevertheless meant a noticeable skew in favour of the operational and functional aspects of the project.

- Concentrate on the 'people' issues. It was clear within 'Albion' FC, that when CRM was referred to, it was the system — as opposed to the people issues — which was being discussed. The club appeared to be making the mistakes highlighted by Gamble *et al.*,²⁷ of ignoring the all important culture changes that needed to accompany the system change.
- Communicate with staff throughout the process. There was very little communication between management and staff which left the staff confused and demotivated. Staff in the biggest customer-facing area — the ticket office — had no formal CRM training and there were no plans to change the organisation to reflect the new practices that were required from them. They were not consulted, advised or involved in any project issues and policy decisions were made without their awareness. Fans were regularly frustrated at the lack of consistency between what was communicated by the club and what they were told by ticket office staff.
- Communicate changes with customers. Compared to mainstream market sectors, sports clubs have a highly involved and committed customer base. Supporters don't shrug their shoulders with indifference when asked to change their own behaviour. This wasn't appreciated prior to or during the

CRM launch. The actual launch of the ticketing system caused severe problems for fans prior to a number of home games. There were significant issues as fans were left without tickets that had not been processed and were forced to queue for up to an hour. This caused bad publicity (football clubs operate in a continual 'goldfish bowl' environment with everyday coverage from the local press) and, rather than helping to build relationships with its fans, it produced the opposite effect, where any new initiatives would be set back significantly.

The special nature of football and its fans means that different emphases are required in order to develop a framework for successful CRM. Fans are generally more loyal, but have different levels of loyalty that need to be understood. They like to be involved with the club and characteristically they have many more differing needs from football due to the emotional nature of the game. The football industry could benefit from an appreciation that fans need to be treated like customers but recognised as being fans. A simple recognition of this is very important, and database marketing can be used to facilitate a bestowing of appropriate 'official' status on long time, loyal supporters.

The point of this paper was to use the in depth story of one club, linked to the observations of various authors of sports marketing literature, to highlight the possible rewards of supporter-centric CRM and the likely perils of poorly thought out implementation. A lack of imagination and education in the planning phases, aligned with basic project management failures, made for a difficult start at 'Albion' FC. It is to be hoped that the club's experiences, though painful, have shed light on smoother transitions for those who follow in their wake.

Acknowledgment

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO ENGLISH PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL CLUBS

Customer Relationship Management Questionnaire

Introduction

Albion Football Club is carrying out a research project into the implementation and uses of CRM in football. We would be grateful if you could complete this short 2 minute questionnaire and return it via either of the following means:

email — research@albionfc.co.uk

fax — 0##### #### #####

post — CRM Research, Marketing Department, Albion FC, Address

We would be willing to share the final results of this survey with you should you be interested. The overall results will also be made available to The Football League; individual questionnaire results will be kept confidential.

Section 1: General

1. Your Name _____
2. Job Name _____
3. Club _____
4. Division for 2004/05 season:
Premier League _____
Coca Cola Championship _____
League One _____
League Two _____
- 5a. Please indicate your clubs latest reported annual turnover:

£1-£4.99m _____, £5-£9.99m _____, £10-£14.99m _____,
£15-£19.99m _____, £20-24.99m _____, £25-£34.99m _____,
£35-£44.99m _____, £45-£59.99m _____, £60-£79.99m _____, over
£80m _____.
- b. Year reported 200 _____
6. Average league attendance in 2003/4 _____
7. Number of employees (non playing or coaching related) _____
8. Does your club have a:
 - a. Chief Executive Officer or Managing Director? YES/NO
 - b. Marketing Manager/Director? YES/NO
 - c. Commercial Manager/Director? YES/NO
 - d. Customer Relationship Manager? YES/NO

Section 2: Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The CRM process can be defined as:

- building a single database of customer information;
- understanding customers through an ability to perform queries, analysis and segmentation techniques;
- use customer insights to develop strategies for the development of increased loyalty and value from the customer base;
- developing measurement techniques which report on success of customer strategies.

Please answer the following questions regarding CRM in football.

9. Does your club have a single database of customer information? YES/NO

If NO, does it intend to develop this capability in the future? YES/NO

When? _____

If YES, what CRM database system do you use? E.g. Talent _____

10. Does your club have an ability to perform queries and analysis on customer data? YES/NO

If NO, does it intend to in the future? YES/NO

When? _____

If YES, do you use customer segmentation and targeting strategies? YES/NO

Do you measure the results of your customer relationship management strategies? YES/NO

11. If you have implemented CRM, what was the expected period where initial investment costs would be expected to be covered (i.e. payback period, e.g. 2 years)? _____

12. Has the implementation of CRM delivered expected results? YES/NO

If no, why not? _____

13. If you have not implemented CRM capabilities and techniques, why not?

14. Do you expect CRM techniques to be an important way of generating income within the football industry in the future? YES/NO

15. Do you feel that football clubs can learn about CRM from companies such as Tesco and Amazon.com? YES/NO

16. Do you feel that CRM techniques are inappropriate within football? YES/NO

If yes, why do you feel that they are inappropriate?

17. Finally, do you have any other related comments regarding CRM within football?

I would be interested in the results of this survey

YES/NO

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION