

Smart thinking

Steve Beecroft, smart technologies consultant with Consulting Smart Ltd, recommends 10 ways to get the most out of smart technologies and customer relationship management (CRM) systems

- 1 Integrate all customer-centric systems with a CRM system**

To derive maximum financial benefit, fully integrate all customer-centric systems with a CRM system. This links islands of data, making targeted marketing campaigns a reality. For example, once customers are in the stadium, they could be alerted of a discount or promotion through an SMS message or smart poster for near field communication (NFC)-enabled mobile phones.
- 2 Retain ownership of the customer**

Outsourcing complete services such as cashless payment or loyalty schemes to a third party could result in the direct relationship with the customer being lost. Access to real-time data is then limited, restricting opportunities to create personalised promotions and offers via CRM, and thereby missing out on additional revenue and restricting the club's ability to manage and nurture customer relationships.
- 3 Use a single smart token**

The more applications that are enabled on a single token, smartcard or even NFC-enabled mobile phone, the more the customer values it. The more a token is used the more data is collected, and the less it will cost both customers and the club. A single token properly implemented can have many uses in and outside the stadium and even with third-party services. It is best to decide the potential applications very early on to enable more efficient planning.
- 4 Involve organisations beyond the gate**

Working with local businesses, local transport providers, the local authority and the wider community can also benefit customers. Promoting healthy eating in schools is a popular quick win. Once even a simple smartcard scheme exists within a school, it is simple to reward attendance, merit, healthy eating and so on – for example with a tour of the stadium, or the chance to meet a player or manager for the day.
- 5 Become a custodian of a cashless scheme**

If a club is the custodian of the cashless scheme it benefits in terms of cash flow. It also ensures the club retains a direct relationship with the customer and autonomy over the day-to-day operation. A cashless system will provide the largest percentage of customer data of any of the systems used to support matchdays.
- 6 Improve the customer experience**

A smartcard scheme can help improve the customer experience. For example, Coventry City FC's cashless scheme at the Ricoh Arena cut the average transaction time from over a minute to 20-30 seconds, drastically reducing queues. It also increased audience penetration at catering kiosks from 45% to 55%. Such effects alone provide justification for implementing a smartcard solution. If that same card also took the customer to the stadium on the bus, through the turnstile and held loyalty points for redemption at the club shop that is truly improving the customer experience.
- 7 Invest in a loyalty scheme**

Loyalty schemes are a very good way of adding value to the card, benefit to the customer and giving data to the club. Build a scheme that is affiliate to multinational online retailers and national retailers so customers can collect points on a daily basis to be redeemed with the club.
- 8 Run targeted promotions**

If targeted marketing encouraged every football fan to spend just £2 more per game attended, annual revenue for a Premiership football club with just a 20,000 gate at every league match would increase by £780,000. For example, if it is known that a customer has an NFC-enabled phone then it is possible to promote the day's kick-off to them. Deliver that promotion via SMS along with a 'bring a friend' offer, and it can be transferred to a friend or family member via NFC. Throw in an offer on a club-branded NFC phone from the club shop or website and this may generate even more revenue.
- 9 Focus on affordability**

Ensure that any supplier configures the solution and the revenue model around your stadia and visitor requirements. This will balance upfront investment with revenue generation and savings, allowing the optimum payback period.
- 10 Insist on marketing support**

Ensure ongoing marketing support is available from the CRM providers as part of the package. Learning how to use the CRM is one thing but learning the how to deploy customised promotions specific to individual customers takes time, so eliminate the learning curve and generate more revenue immediately.