



CASE STUDY: SOUTHEND UNITED FC

MORE INSIGHTS, MORE CUSTOMERS, HIGHER BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Southend United and the Data4Venues approach: Green 4 Solutions, SKIDATA and Agilysys

English Football League One club Southend United is benefiting from accumulating greater levels of data and using the aggregated business intelligence delivered by the Data4Venues consortium to achieve a greater insight into supporter behaviour. By integrating CRM from Green 4 Solutions, access control and management from SKIDATA and powerful hospitality and guest management from Agilysys, Southend has improved the supporters' experience and increased club revenues.

"About six years ago we analysed our supporter base," says Geoffrey King, Chief Executive, Southend United. "Like many smaller clubs we found attendance was falling and the overall supporter base was ageing. If we took no action and this trend continued we would struggle to maintain our position in the league, with the risk of dropping to league two and beyond." The club considered its options. "The first was playing better. Easier said than done, and of course as a football team, the club had always aspired to play at a higher level. The second was attracting more people. Based on our research, we knew we had to be far better in our marketing to families and younger people, and we had to break the established link between on pitch performance and off field revenues."

This was the start of a journey that, by the 2009-10 season, had seen significant investment in new systems and approaches across all of the club's operations at its Roots Hall stadium. The idea was to drive a sustained increase in supporter numbers while in parallel improving performance on the pitch. The formula worked and, with a lot of hard work, Southend moved from the bottom of Coca-Cola League Two into League One and for a brief time in the Championship. On-pitch performance has not been continuously upwards, but as a business Southend United is now perfectly placed for its planned move into a new state-of-the-art venue.

League One Family Club of the Year

Southend United received the Family Excellence Award at the Football League Awards in 2009. "This was great recognition of all the efforts by our staff and commercial department," says King. "In the last six years our membership has grown massively." This success was exactly what the Club had in mind when it started to rethink how it interacted with supporters and corporate customers.

"We run community and education programmes in schools," King continues, "and we started leaving information with children and a voucher. If the family completed all parts of the voucher, including e-mail and mobile number, we sent them a discounted match ticket. We started with simple Excel spreadsheets to keep track of our fans' activities, but soon consolidated our database into a new CRM system, which later became our primary communication system delivered by Green 4 Solutions, who had the expertise we wanted."

Southend was able to increase its original 1,900 names and addresses to over 70,000 clean, deduplicated records today, where the focus is as much on the quality of customer data as the volume.

Come and see Green 4 Solutions at Stadia Expo on Booth 3080

www.green4solutions.com



Better data - improved relationships

“Once we got the communication right, crowds started to increase - especially families,” King says. An early adopter of CRM in the sports stadia sector, Southend has continued to invest in CRM technology, not least to dovetail with other investments in areas like ticket sales and stadium access. The CRM system is in effect a data warehouse that can incorporate all of these other valuable streams of customer data online. Using this collated transactional data, the club has been able to deliver relevant, personalised emails and newsletters, which have become essential communications media.

The CRM solution meant it was easy for staff to create and deliver newsletters, surveys, commercial offers and more, including more sophisticated content such as streamed video and the ‘Chairman’s Blog’. Campaigns can not only be designed and executed quickly by the club’s own staff but, crucially, the provision of Clickstream Analysis also allows the club to measure response levels for every single campaign. The tight integration of application software packages gives Southend an exceptional platform: in particular, the customer insight required to plan and deploy highly effective campaigns, with easy-to-use customer profiling tools for better targeting, improved response rates and less wastage.

Indeed, Data4Venues is all about joining-up operational systems in such a way that a club gains visibility of all activities and expenditure undertaken by its customers. By understanding levels of expenditure by various supporter groups, such as families - and more importantly knowing precisely what their spending is on - the club is ideally placed to generate even greater revenues based on things it knows the customer likes. For example, a family purchasing drinks, pies and a program may be rewarded with a voucher for a matchday family package. The objective is to understand purchasing characteristics and then stimulate an increase in spending in a similar manner as that undertaken by supermarkets and online retailers. The ultimate position is that all expenditure is managed in a cashless environment, where a closed environment reduces queues and queuing time, increases average spend and allows the club to measure all purchasing behaviour.

Seeing more and building performance

Geoffrey King continues, “As crowds increased we also needed to control numbers more effectively - how you get people in and out safely and quickly, in the most efficient ways. Bearing in mind our plans with the new stadium we decided to invest in the best-of-breed solution for access control: SKIDATA.”

The Club implemented SKIDATA ticket readers and turnstiles and SKIDATA Handshake software, which interfaces to Green 4 Solutions and the ticketing system. With multiple ticket standards and formats supported, the future-proofed SKIDATA system delivered immediate benefits: preventing misuse and counterfeit protection, in the multi-application capabilities provided, and in personnel costs. Specifically, Handshake software enabled fast ticket authentication and access management. Large visitor volumes are processed rapidly, and there is a multi-level fail-safety concept to eliminate downtime.

“SKIDATA also adds a new marketing dimension: by seeing when a ticket-holder enters the ground, we can incentivise them to arrive earlier,” says King. “For example, a season ticket holder who comes regularly but only arrives at 2.45pm. You can send an email or an SMS message on the day with a voucher ‘Arrive at 2.15pm, bring a friend and collect your special two-for-one offer on food or drink’. We could even send their ticket directly to their mobile phone. With the CRM, access control and F&B systems talking to each other we can drive food and beverage sales and measure the success of the campaign. Using the same system we reduce the amount of staff required at the gate. If a used ticket is passed back to someone else to enter, the system will prevent this. In a similar way a light on the barrier identifies a ticket as being an adult, concession or child. Thanks to features like these, we have reduced staffing levels and significantly cut down on fraud.”



Serving customers more efficiently and profitably

The other critical element is food service and hospitality. In 2006, the Club implemented InfoGenesis POS from Agilysys Hospitality Solutions with IBM touch-screen terminals. In addition to outlets and kiosks throughout the stadium, hospitality facilities include function suites, the Blues Lounge, Far Post Lounge and Shrimpers Bar. Previously, some outlets had electronic cash registers while others used cash boxes; the Financial Controller could wait days for reports to be collated manually. After implementation, however, all relevant data is captured and, as soon as a match or event is over, reports can be automatically e-mailed to the Financial Controller. Measurable benefits came after only a few matches. "We saw quicker customer throughput," says King. "The system is simple to use, training of operators was fast, and management information is excellent. We can track stock levels far more easily and make faster decisions on restocking, so avoiding shortages.

"We can monitor customer spend through all the registers, accessing that information quickly to see the stock sold, the cost of that stock and the sales value, so we can see what profit we should be making. We have that control. The next step is mobile. We are taking InfoGenesis POS into the new ground when we can go cashless, with all outlets having readers to take cashless cards."

Data4Venues: an integrated approach

King says, "The main benefits of our integrated approach, the Data4Venues approach, come from the opportunities presented by gathering all your information together and being able to analyse it. To better understand our customers and make strategic decisions of what offers we want to make." Staff in the Club call centre can also access the CRM system, call up a customer's record and chat to them about, say, the last event attended and did they enjoy it. Everything is made more personal. Based on the aggregated information, the sales agent can also see the customer may visit often but hardly ever buys a drink or food. Again an offer can be made, perhaps with a promotion to try the new pies. "The important issues in terms of running our business is having the raw data that describes how we interact with our customers, the levels of expenditure, who by and what on?" King adds. "With Data4Venues we have this in abundance, allowing us to improve the supporters' matchday experience and generate greater revenues for the club.

"Southend is streets ahead of anyone else in this league and even the Premiership, in terms of our use of technology and the high customer satisfaction rates we achieve. The great thing is that what we have achieved is transferable: Technically speaking it is repeatable at other venues, the experience we have gained during the last six years is perhaps more difficult to copy. When we started we didn't have any IT resource onsite. Now, with a qualified IT person as a key member of staff we can see an even faster rate of return on our technology investment."

King concludes with a final insight: "Our Commercial Director told me recently the Club had achieved more sales in the last financial year (2008-9), a tough year for everyone, than in the previous year, with a mediocre 'on pitch performance'. Without our investment in technology and all the hard work we have implemented, we simply wouldn't have achieved that level of performance.

SKIDATA 4 VENUES

Introducing the all purpose stadia and arena solution...

Data4Venues is an integrated Cashless, Loyalty and Club Membership solution that increases match-day revenue, rewards loyalty and captures all purchase and product transactions giving your business a unique customer insight.

Standalone or proprietary systems often provide one of these elements, for example queue busting benefits, but then fall short of rewarding or incentivising fans. Data4Venues closes that loop, delivers all of the benefits of a cashless environment and yet creates valuable customer knowledge which allows you to generate new revenue streams.

If you are considering a cashless solution.... look beyond the basics, and think strategically about your future business aims, and how you can efficiently use this customer insight to grow your memberships, sponsorships and per head revenue.

DATA4Venues is a formalised and tested partnership between three leading Stadium solution providers in Europe, namely, Skidata, Green4 Solutions and Agilysys.

The solution is formed around the belief and fact that other cashless solutions do not capture valuable supporter information, they just remove cash from the operation.

DATA4Venues believes capturing information about customers and enriching the quality of your data is just as important as removing cash from the operation.

DATA4Venues closes that traditional gap, delivers all of the benefits of a cashless environment and yet creates valuable knowledge of your supporters which allows you to generate new revenue streams based on customer demand, their purchasing habits, time of arrival and above all, their loyalty.

All stadiums, new, old or in the planning phase, have some form of Access Control, Ticketing, CRM and EPOS system. This solution removes the risk stadiums have when dealing with unknown partners who's solutions may or may not integrate.

The Stadium has control and ownership of the balance/money that is on account and therefore have all the forward revenue.

An operator or caterer or retailer can be appointed and benefit, but THE VENUE keeps and owns the valuable customer data if the operator or caterer changes.

Customer data is THE most valuable asset but delivers the benefits of "one card" and cashless.