

# Closer to the fan

Knowing your venue's customers and their preferences is a great first step to maximising income from tickets and event-related products.

**A**midst the industry chatter about ticketing giants and new technology, venue managers need to calmly consider what's best for their buildings. What's the retail mix? Does it involve only a ticket or is it more complex? Can any building sell only a ticket any more? The software that drives the commercial arm of any venue is now customer-centred and, increasingly, is a customer relationship management (CRM) application. Because technology is now 'open', CRM can link to internal and external ticketing services and form the hub of a venue's engagement with its customers.

Quantity is guaranteed when you have 5,000-90,000 people coming through your turnstiles on a regular basis. Venues have progressively installed card-based access control from companies like Fortress GB, Teamcard, Skidata and StarNet, enabling them to collect vital customer information. Ticketing software companies, such as tickets.com, Iris and Paciolan, have responded by introducing CRM concepts and support for customer communications channels such as email and mobile.

However, venues can take a different approach by taking advantage of the rapid development of CRM by major software companies such as Oracle, IBM and Microsoft. These companies provide the research and development to advance the software's capabilities while partners specialise in applying CRM to particular business sectors.

CRM enables venues to operate with quality as well as quantity. CRM in sport expert Green4Solutions advises pulling together all transactions – from ticketing, club shop and web site – and asking 'what, when and how often' to get a clearer picture of customers. There are various techniques, such as running satisfaction surveys and offering prizes, to encourage customers to keep their details up to date and accurate – self-cleaning the database.

Green4's 4CRM is based on Microsoft Dynamics, which is a business platform for small and medium sized businesses that suits the scale of many venues. From a management point of view, this is helpful for integration with other office products, especially Outlook email and for the creation of custom web sites with ecommerce that integrate with accounts.

Green4's communication suite puts the data to work. A 'Word-like' editor makes it easy to create appealing emails and to send them to relevant segments of the customer database. Green4 suggests 'informational' emails containing elements such as current league tables or player profiles to capture interest and ensure the emails are opened.

Staff can build rules into the software so that each email is personalised, perhaps based on purchasing history. Calendar-based events, such as birthdays or public holidays, can trigger relevant emails.

With Green4's CRM-driven ticketing, you can use the same transaction engine to provide customers with access to car park, VIP services, tickets, leisure and retail products. Ticketing can include 'pick a seat' type technology. The system handles the 'basket', the payment (via external payment provider as necessary) and communicates with a confirmation email, all the time capturing customer data.

## CRM in action

St Helens Rugby League club is working with Green4 to help it during its transition to a new stadium, with a year in limbo playing at a temporary ground. The club's web site needs to be its virtual venue, a home for St Helens fans who don't have a physical home for 12 months. In combination with its retail store, it's also a vital way to get merchandise (the home kit) out to the fans. "We are in effect a cyber club," says Peter Carter at St Helens.

"We need systems to help the team," says Carter, explaining that the move to the new stadium means a complete uplift in the business his staff will be involved in. "To be able to sell something on a non-matchday will be a complete novelty for the club."

Combined CRM and ticketing is how St

St Helens Rugby League club is using CRM to sell the benefits of its new stadium.



Helens has gone about selling the new stadium's inventory: its season tickets to fans anxious about seat positions, its 350 premier club places suitable for local businesses and its non-matchday facilities.

Green4's ticketing software is modular and can therefore be put together to suit an existing ticket sales process, for example if you want to sell by single fixture or series of fixtures or one-off product, such as a VIP box for a concert. The purchaser uses a 'mouse over' technique to see available seats and pricing, and event information can be saved to a calendar, emailed to a friend or shared via social networks.

MMArena in Le Mans (see SAM October 2010) hasn't allowed the fact that it is a young club with very few fans to put it off developing a new stadium, designed to look after corporate clientele and broadcast partners, and to host non-football events.

Le Mans FC General Manager Alexandre Bazire told delegates at Stadia & Arena Marseille that because it doesn't have a regular fan base, CRM is the club's way of building and connecting with an appropriate audience for its different events. Its marketing strategy therefore puts CRM at the heart, connecting out to cashless payment, e-shop, ticketing, RFID access and payment, parking and media. Atos Origin is the IT provider.

## Getting to know you

Southend's Chairman Geoffrey King is also a fan of CRM: "We had no-one in the organisation who knew much about IT. We found Green4's CRM so easy to integrate that we needed no IT consultant, internal or external." King credits the software with better data, more customers and higher business volumes. Before CRM, he asked his marketing department about Southend's customers and its spreadsheets could tell him nothing.

King asked his staff, including stewards walking down queues, to gather information about the club's customers to populate the CRM database. What he found was an ageing audience. A family marketing campaign and taking football to schools has turned this around. Integrated access control (with Skidata turnstiles) has allowed a reduction of staff, reduction in fraud and improved safety. The club is using email and the website to keep in front of fans, and CRM to understand customers' purchasing patterns, resulting in targeted marketing and increased secondary spend. In the future King wants a planned new stadium to be cashless, creating a "closed loop system".

Leicester City FC Commercial Director Paul Hunt, speaking at Soccerex European Forum in

May, explained how his club is using data to more astutely market its products. His department identified, as at Southend, a need to appeal to the next generation of fans. It therefore offers family night football, a cheap way of watching the reserve team, and it has established a junior membership club. Every child in Leicester at 7 years old gets a shirt and ticket. The club also visits every school in the area three times per year. Hunt also recommends using software communication tools, such as email and social media, to research what fans are thinking.

In the US, University of California, Irvine, is following the same philosophy by using Paciolan's Pac CRM to cultivate and enrich fan and season ticket holder relationships. It communicates with its customers through tools such as Pac Social Media and PACMail. US academic institutions also have another important revenue stream in their donors. UC Irvine is therefore using Paciolan's fundraising solution, tFund, to manage donations, track donor interactions and recruit new donors.

## Ticketing evolution

Ticketing continues to change quickly and there are some interesting experiments and success stories. From Accrington Stanley offering tickets for a fiver to UEFA receiving applications from 600,000 people from 161 countries for the 500,000 tickets available for Euro 2012, every event owner is trying to maximise ticketing revenue.

Ticketing platforms have to offer 'fair' access to general admission applicants, plus lotteries to allocate tickets when oversubscribed, and sophisticated fan communication to keep everyone informed. Variable pricing has been around for a while when certain are priced ahead of time in categories which reflect predicted interest and charge appropriately. Real-time variable pricing has been pioneered by the San Francisco Giants, as Jeff Mallett (member of the ownership group of Giants and Derby County) explained at a Soccerex European forum. Mallett said that San Francisco Giants organisation uses 26 criteria to guide variable pricing to its games. If one of the stars is injured or there's a traffic problem, the club knows it must price more aggressively.

Fan to fan secondary sales are a good way of keeping venues at capacity even when ticket holders can't make it. The ProVenue Ticketing Management System handled all ticketing for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, including the first-ever officially sanctioned secondary ticketing platform in Olympic history.



The one basket approach: merchandise and ticketing on one web site, with one log-in and one payment page. Fan-friendly features include replica shirt personalisation, merchandise stock control, seat choice by mouse click and confirmation email.