



Liverpool FC score with online ticketing

After their sensational win in the European Championship, Liverpool Football Club's membership and ticket applications are set to soar. But the Reds are already a step ahead, with an integrated Smartcard, web sales and loyalty scheme from Fortress GB and IRIS Software4Sport.

The scheme is helping the club to allocate tickets on a fair basis, improve customer service and reduce the costs of processing the deluge of ticket applications.

25TH MAY 2005 - FINAL WHISTLE - "WE DID IT!"

A sea of red shirts in the stands of Istanbul's Ataturk stadium cheer wildly. Dazed supporters on the streets of Liverpool sing themselves hoarse to 'You'll never walk alone'.

Whether you were supporting Liverpool or not in the final on the 25th of May 2005, you can't deny that the club's supporters put on as good a performance as the players.

Liverpool FC has had more applications for tickets and memberships than are available for decades and, after winning the European Championship, the ticket office is bracing itself for a deluge of applications for next season. But how is the club going to allocate season tickets fairly with increasing waiting lists? And how are they going to cope with the extra demand placed upon the ticket office?

STREAMLINED TICKETING SYSTEM

Liverpool Football Club is one of many clubs who sell their tickets in-house, using a software system developed specifically for sports clubs, TALENT Sport. All tickets the club sells - whether through the club website, over the phone or at the counter - are sold through TALENT from same inventory in real-time.

Selling online is becoming an increasingly important channel for the club. Ken Webster, Liverpool FC's IT Manager, explains:

"At recent games, we have been selling up to 25% of the available match tickets through our website. That's a huge proportion. It's a win-win situation for us and our supporters. There are big savings for us in printing, mailing and admin. The fans can buy their tickets through the website 24 hours a day with no queue. Even people who don't buy their tickets over the web benefit, as there are fewer queues for them to face."

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ONLINE TICKETING

As for selling season tickets renewals, the impact can be felt even more strongly here. Ken continues:

"Season ticket renewals is an extremely labor intensive process if you are doing it manually. We have around 27,000 season ticket holders and even more membership applications, so that means hundreds of thousands of envelopes to open, direct debit details to check, confirmations to send out.... If we can channel more renewals to the website, the potential for cost savings is enormous."

"Last season was the first time we offered renewals over the website. 10-12% of all the renewals were carried out online. We were amazed with this figure - especially as we didn't publicise the fact that you could renew online to the supporters. This year, we are really going to promote it, and we hope to get the figure up to around 20-25%."

SMART MOVES

The club plans to extend its Smartcard

scheme, after it was successfully rolled out on a smaller scale last year. Sixty of the ground's turnstiles - around three-quarters - have now been fitted with Fortress GB's Smart card-controlled readers, which are linked back to TALENT Sport.

The majority of season ticket holders must now use their Smartcard to enter the stadium instead of the traditional season ticket book. Whenever the customer holds their card to the radio-frequency controlled reader, it instantly messages TALENT to verify the card is valid for the match. If the card is valid, a green light flashes and the turnstile opens. The whole process takes less than a second.

Ken explains the aims behind the scheme:

"Smartcard technology is the way ahead for the football industry. It allows you greater control over the whole ticketing process. If a season ticket holder loses their card, it can simply be deactivated and re-sent to them. Likewise, it gives us much greater control over security."

Glenn Jackson, Managing Director of IRIS's Software4Sport division, agrees:

"More and more clubs are seeing the benefits of Smartcard technology for improving security and cutting stadium entry time. The system will allow Liverpool FC to provide a better football experience so that fans keep coming back for more."

CUTTING DOWN ON ADMINISTRATION

The club stand to make further cost savings with the extension of the Smartcard scheme, through reducing administration. When season ticket holders renew their season ticket online, their card is instantly updated. Ken comments:



"Next season, season ticket holders will be using the cards they already have from last season. We used to have to print out and mail the booklets, but now we can just reactivate the cards for the 05/06 season."

REWARDING LOYALTY

With demand for tickets growing ever higher, the club needs to ensure that it allocates tickets for popular matches fairly. To meet this goal, the club has launched a Fancard, so that non-season ticket holders' - as well as season ticket holders' - loyalty can be recorded and duly rewarded.

Season Ticket holders all receive Fancard status automatically. Non-season ticket holders can buy their Fancard for £2.50.

Every time a customer buys a match or season ticket, or attends a match, loyalty is automatically recorded in their customer record on TALENT, and used for cup

games and away games. When purchasing tickets, customers provide their Fancard Customer Number, either by handing it to the Ticket Office, quoting it via the telephone booking line or by post, or using it to login online. If a Fancard is lost or stolen, it can simply be deactivated and reissued, with the data held on the lost or stolen Fancard transferred onto the new Fancard.

Ken says:

"With TALENT Sport we can identify what our fans are entitled to. It is a transparent system and everybody appreciates it. Fortress GB and IRIS Software4Sport have provided us with the tools to improve service and manage our ticketing more efficiently."

"To come back from 3-0 down was just fantastic. It has been an unbelievable end to the season for the club!"

Sports clubs and venues using TALENT Sport include Rangers FC, Durham CCC, Hull City AFC, Ipswich Town FC, Leeds United FC, Liverpool FC, Manchester City FC, Mansfield Town FC, Newcastle United FC, Norwich City FC, Rangers FC, Reading FC and Wolverhampton Wanderers FC.



IRIS Software4Sport
software4sport@iris.co.uk
www.iris.co.uk/software4sport

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