

Fan as customer

Ticketing systems are integrating automated telephone and web sales and renewals. It all adds up to more efficiency and more time for sales-oriented activity.

Ticket selling has undergone a massive change in the last decade, moving from face to face and one to one telephone sales, to internet and automated telephone sales and minimal face to face work.

The queue for the serial (season) ticket has been replaced by a mailout of smartcards. One-off sales are via the web with pickup at a kiosk. Innovations such as reselling, auction and print at home, often pioneered by small companies, have been incorporated into the offerings from the 'big boys'.

Five years on from the dotcom revolution venues have a choice of tried and tested applications 'fit for purpose'.

Commercial intent

Barclays Premiership side West Bromwich Albion FC are about to enter the second full season using the Tickets.com solution, ProVenueMax. The club have recently installed Ticket Kiosks provided by Tickets.com which have helped them significantly reduce the queues at the Ticket Office on match days by enabling supporters to quickly collect tickets they have pre-booked over the internet or telephone.

The box office staff at Coca Cola League One team MK Dons FC completed training and installation at their National Hockey Stadium home before the end of last season and have used the ProVenueMax system over the summer for selling and administering season ticket sales and handling the sale of tickets for the club's preseason fixtures.

"Installation of the new system has opened up new opportunities for us in terms of ticket selling and will allow us to make better use of the sales data we collect from our supporters," said Kirstine Nicholson, Operations Manager, MK Dons. "With the introduction of internet sales from next season and the club securing its

League One status we are expecting an increase in sales for next season and the solution will play a vital part in meeting the challenges ahead."

Guinness Premiership rugby team Gloucester Rugby has also recently installed a ProVenueMax system which will manage all ticket sales made via the club's ticket office and website.

"We are looking forward to introducing the system through the summer and then maximising the benefits that both Tickets.com and the ProVenueMax system will offer us during next season," said Charlie Little, Commercial Manager, Gloucester Rugby. "Gloucester Rugby has a loyal and committed supporter base and the marketing tools that ProVenueMax offers will allow us to understand the purchasing behaviour of our fans over a season in greater detail."

Scunthorpe United and Northampton Town FC are also due to install and upgrade to ProVenueMax for the coming season. Tickets.com Sales Manager, Peter Scrivener, sees all these clubs as similar in their commercial aims: "All the clubs we have installed recently and are talking to at the moment want to sell more tickets and make

more of the marketing data they have in order to increase revenue," he commented. "Our solution meets these needs by being flexible enough to deal with individual client requirements and offering a service which benefits both the client and the supporter."

Web renewals

"Liverpool Football Club is one of many clubs who sell their tickets in-house, using Talent Sport, that runs on the IBM iSeries platform. All tickets the club sells – whether through the club website, over the phone or at the counter – are sold through Talent from the 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 shorter queues for them to face."

As for selling season tickets renewals, the impact can be felt even more strongly here. Ken continues: "Season ticket renewals is an extremely labour 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."



As reigning European Champions, Liverpool FC has an enviable fan base. Season ticket renewals via the Internet is helping the box office cope with demand.

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Ken adds: "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 at 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%."

Telephone sales

Leeds is now the first club in the UK to sign up to Talent Sport's new Automated Telephone Sales (ATS) facility, due to go live at the club next season, with the aim of further reducing ticket office queues. Customers will be able to call a dedicated number and be guided through the automated route to make their purchase, with instant information and ticket availability on the way. ATS will sell from the Talent Sport inventory in real time, so availability is instantly checked and confirmed for customers.

Katie Holmes, Ticket Service Manager for Leeds United FC says, "ATS will be fantastic for customer service. We will be able to channel routine ticket sales calls through the automated route, giving our staff more time to help customers where there is a specialised query and cutting queues down substantially."

Glenn Jackson, Software4Sport's Managing Director points out another benefit of ATS: "Football clubs face very uneven and unpredictable workloads. If you get through to the play-offs in the same month that you have a concert happening, you have a challenge. Talent ATS is ideal when you are in a busy period. You can order more phone lines, for however long you need them, in an instant. When you're in a quiet period, simply turn the lines off."

Customer records can also help deal with the issue of fan loyalty. At Liverpool, 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.

Ken Webster says: "With Talent Sport we can identify what our fans are entitled to. It is

Beijing gears up operations ready for 2008

"Sports and entertainment are an important part of the culture in China," says Jonathan Krane, of Emma Entertainment based in Beijing. "There is a deep patriotism for anything Chinese including athletes and singers. But there is also a growing interest in culture from international markets."

Who or what is Emma? It's the company that used the China Tennis Open in 2004 to launch itself into the Chinese market and it has an exclusive five-year agreement with the Open and has a long-term exclusive with the Workers' Stadium (see SAM October 2004). Emma has a group and corporate sales department that targets both international and domestic corporations. For the China Tennis Open, the company offers corporate packages (VIP boxes) for the entire tournament.

Spurred on by major sporting events leading up to and beyond Beijing 2008, Chinese venues, and customers, are embracing the most modern ticketing systems. Traditionally paper tickets have been sold on the street for many events. But China will have the highest rate of mobile 'phone ownership by the Olympics so tickets are going to leap rapidly from basic print to 2D barcode on a mobile screen.

Emma is leading the way with (Skidata) access control technology, initially to deal with the problem of counterfeit stock. At Workers' Stadium, realtime barcode readers are networked with a server and database.



Above: Manchester United vs. Beijing match played on 26 July in Workers' Stadium, Beijing. Emma has installed full wireless technology with handheld devices scanning bar codes at the entrance gates.

a transparent system and everybody appreciates it."

A Windows-based CRM application that continues to make headway in the UK is AudienceView. Sheffield International Venues (SIV) has chosen it for in-house ticket sales and CRM. SIV has diverse needs for its network of multiple venues, 13 in all, and needs to manage large volume sales for events such as concerts, selling over 1.7 million tickets annually.

"Because of the critical role ticketing plays in our complex business, we underwent a thorough review of the industry," said Andrew Snelling, Finance Director for SIV. "As a result of a rigorous scored analysis of 14 major products from around the world, based on technical and customer service needs of our business now and in the future, we ultimately chose AudienceView."

Brentford Football Club, a UK Coca Cola League One club, has also chosen to replace its existing system with AudienceView's web-based in-house ticketing and CRM. The AudienceView system provides a secure online environment for club members to purchase tickets and manage their accounts.

John McGlashan, Executive Director at Brentford FC, said "After almost a year of researching the different options available, we decided upon AudienceView since it stood out

as the clear winner in providing for both our current needs and plans for future growth within each of the key departments of our organisation."

Bespoke system

With such sophisticated applications available, most venues choose an 'out of the box' system, but York Racecourse has gone against the grain and commissioned its own software from Leeds-based bespoke software specialist Logical Minds Ltd.

Logical Minds' Director David Weaver says: "By doing away with the old pre-ordered paper-based system and developing a software solution tailored specifically to the needs of York Racecourse, we have ensured that it now has one of the most sophisticated, customer-focused ticketing systems in the country."

Visitors are now able to order on-line or over the telephone, with a new QuickAddress system which enables staff to accurately identify the customer's address through postcode and house number details.

Order processing is also carried out on the system, ensuring that standard and discounted ticket prices are applied consistently.

"We are very impressed with the system," says York Racecourse's Head of Marketing and Sponsorship James Brennan.