

Network Defence Helps Bolton Wanderers Play the Loyalty Card

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Gareth Moores, Commercial Director, Bolton Wanderers FC

Key Benefits:

- Faster and more secure turnstile control system
- Reward benefits to the club and fans
- Data capture of customers' transaction history
- Improved security

The Challenge:

Bolton Wanderers FC, founded in 1874 and one of the twelve original members of the Football League, is rightly proud of its footballing pedigree and history. However, the club has its eyes set firmly on the future when it comes to relationships with its supporters. “Unless we treat our fans like customers, they will support us from the comfort of their armchairs,” says Gareth Moores, the club’s commercial director.

With this in mind Bolton Wanderers wanted to help attract supporters to the club’s ground through the season and realised replacing their traditional paper season ticket booklets with a smart card solution would deliver key benefits to the club and its supporters.

The Solution:

Starting smart

Bolton Wanderers relied on consultancy and project management from specialist integrator Network Defence to deploy an advanced, smart-card based fans’ loyalty scheme and CRM system.

The decision was made to deploy the TeamCard solution in March 2001, with the aim of having the solution deployed by July 2001, ready for the start of the 2001/02 season. This already tight timescale was made even tighter with a further complication: Wanderers was fighting for promotion to the Premiership in the Division One play-offs, meaning its season did not end until May 31st. This left a very narrow window for completing the project, and it had to be right first time.

Integration issues

The key deployment issue to address was integrating the TeamCard solution, from vendor ScotComms, to the club's main ticketing system from Synchron Systems. The ticketing system uses a SQL database, with no direct interface to the information stream from the TeamCard card readers installed at turnstiles at the club's ground, as well as in the club shops and refreshment outlets.

Without this interface, booking and cross-referencing of seat availability would be impossible – also prohibiting more advanced CRM applications.

At this point, Network Defence was called in to liaise between ScottComms and Synchron, and to oversee the development of an interface between the two systems.

While developing this interface, Network Defence deployed a fibre network to link the TeamCard card readers at each turnstile and outlet in the club's ground. A switched network architecture serves the club's main IT systems and Synchron ticketing system, linking to the fibre network.

Network Defence director Sue Beesley says: "Our role was to coordinate actions between the two vendors to ensure the two systems worked seamlessly, to evaluate what was needed for the interface, make sure those needs were met in the solution and ensure it was rolled out effectively. This

hands-on management was vital given the deadline for going live with the system.”

Gareth Moores adds: “At each stage in building our TeamCard solution, Network Defence has played a key role in providing consultancy and support, and ensuring the deployment is smooth and quick. We could not have made the giant strides in IT that we have without their expertise.”

Going live

The TeamCard solution went live well in advance of the new 2001 / 02 season, with all season ticket holders being issued with the new smart cards during the summer.

At a basic level, the card’s chip stores seating and fixture details, and gives the club complete visibility over which season ticket holders attend which matches, which turnstile they enter, how soon before the match they arrive, when they leave, what they buy in the ground and what they buy in team shops.

The cardholder presents the card to the turnstile operator who dips it into an electronic reader before granting access to the stadium. TeamCard also gives fans a chance to see more football matches. "About 5 - 8% of season ticket holders cannot attend matches," explained Gareth Moores. "The TeamCard allows us to buy back individual games and sell them on to other fans on match day."

Season ticket holders unable to attend matches are encouraged to notify the club in advance, for a reward of £10 worth of points loaded onto their TeamCard, which can be spent at the club's merchandise shop or on refreshments in the grounds. The club estimates that it can make an additional £15 on each ticket recycled in this way.

The Benefits:

Bolton Wanderers successful pioneering of an advanced, smart-card based fans' loyalty scheme and CRM system has paid dividends to the club and fans alike.

The smart card solution has delivered a number of key benefits to Bolton Wanderers and its supporters. Firstly, it gives a faster and more secure turnstile control system for access to the ground. Secondly, the smart card system acts as a platform for a loyalty scheme delivering affiliate marketing and reward benefits to fans and to the club. Thirdly, it enables full information capture of customers' transaction history – a vital step in driving customer relations. Finally, it allows the club to 'recycle' tickets and allocate unused seats to fans – gaining revenue on match days that would otherwise be lost.

TeamCard also improves security – lost cards can be replaced and old tickets de-activated, reducing fraud.

However, a key benefit for both fans and the club is the affinity programme with local shops and national organisations, such as Boots, The AA, British Gas. Every time a Bolton Wanderers TeamCard holder spends with these companies and others, they earn up to 2% affiliate bonus in points that give discounts at Bolton's club shops, at the food stores in the stadium and on future season tickets. This rewards fans for their loyalty and benefits the club.

With over 32,000 TeamCard holders, which includes season ticket holders, lottery members and junior members, Gareth Moores estimates that TeamCard delivers six-figure revenues to the club's coffers each year, making it a key source of income.

Technologies Used:

- Network Infrastructure