

Case Study: Communications, Media & Technology

England's Football Association increases fan engagement to make football for all

Next-gen digital engagement anticipates and meets the needs of millions of players, fans and volunteers, helping The FA make football in England truly for all.

The English Football Association (The FA), formed in 1863, is the oldest football association in the world, responsible for overseeing all aspects of the game in England, from grassroots matches played countrywide by amateurs, to globally streamed broadcast championships like The FA Cup.

As the administrative headquarters (HQ) and governing body, The FA orchestrates the development of football and its players, and seeks to create deeper engagements with every participant so that English football can thrive at home and abroad.

Because opportunities and experiences in the football industry are defined by deep insights into the people and processes that count, The FA's engagement vision focuses on knowing and connecting with its audiences directly and personally.



At a glance

The English Football Association's growing digital engagement programme is reaching evermore participants in the sport. By delivering relevant, personalised experiences to fans, no matter how they participate in football, The FA delivers the moments and connections that all stakeholders really want. Highlights of the partnership include:

- Over 30,000 clubs signed up to the Match Day App and the grassroots game management platform
- Payment processing capability for match fees and subs for 90,000+ teams
- Wider participation across the Football Community with 150,000+ downloads and 68,000 weekly users, doubling the expected target via the new FA Match Day app
- The ability to execute omnichannel recruitment and marketing campaigns

This vision, brought to life through the new Digital Engagement (DE) programme, highlights The FA's ambition to engage with all participants with greater precision and speed. Moreover, to ensure this programme had a continuous and purposeful change on the broader organisation, The FA selected Cognizant to deliver on the transformation vision.

Craig Donald, chief information officer at The FA, says, "Cognizant really took time to understand the business we're in and understand what we need to achieve. For a digital transformation of this scale, it was crucial that we found a partner that had been there before. They have become a strategic ally along our journey, providing sports industry specialists to shape our ambition as well as designing, building and managing the technology programmes and skills underpinning our entire organisation."

The challenge

Shifts in consumer and broadcaster behaviour have changed football at all levels forever, driving The FA's desire to embed digital innovation across its core operational infrastructure with tools, processes and people that sustain The FA. By deploying data-driven insights and capabilities into digital products and solutions, it would both expand football's reach and streamline the backbone operations that connect football across England. Accomplishing these goals required a reimagining of The FA's technology ecosystem, which included a disparate range of products and platforms, some over 10 years old.

Donald adds, "It was time to move away from large monolithic systems, to much more agile, loosely coupled microservices-based platforms, which will allow The FA to pivot quickly when stakeholder requirements change." The spirit of the new digital push was underpinned by a vision to *unite the game, inspire a nation.*"

The approach

In order to stay connected and remain relevant to new generations of players, coaches and fans, our client embraced the next generation operating

- Increased revenues through partnership opportunities offered by the engagement products and solutions, powered by data insights
- Greater visibility of grassroots match results and development data via the new FA Full Time solution, with over 48M page views, 2.2M users signed up and over 40,000 county teams actively participating across England
- A consolidated intelligence data platform delivering a 360-degree fan view of over 5M fan records

model. Cognizant's engagement platform enabled it to move beyond organisation and rule making into growing and deepening relationships with all participants, and to derive strategic business value from interactive audience engagement.

Anticipating new ways to engage

Our business engineering programme brought data modernisation, process automation and digital consumer products, as well as a commitment to delivering a continuous and accurate, data-driven view of football participation in England. The results help The FA to:

- Increase and measure the number of participants in the sport, especially in underrepresented sections of society
- Engage directly with all football's participants: armchair fans to players, and sideline spectators to volunteers and staff
- Provide a single view of all participants and their activity in football
- Enhance the football experience for participants with advanced personalised digital consumer products that simplify and delight
- Increase revenues via opportunities that the platform offers to partners

- Implement omnichannel campaigning that targets all constituents

Cognizant's multidisciplinary business engineering team, embedded at The FA's Wembley Stadium HQ physically and virtually, combines a range of skillsets from across the globe. The team includes business consultants, technology and industry specialists, and researchers and anthropologists that are able to adopt a 'human centered' approach to digital.

Leading with digital customer engagement

Cognizant consultants created detailed data segmentation analyses that cut across user personas and preferences, from players and coaches, to fans and enablers such as administrators and parents. Multiple lenses were used to categorise participation in the sport and engagement with The FA. These included watching a game, digital engagement via various platforms and user behaviors. The insights from this exploration helped deliver targeted content to The FA's audiences and football's participants. We used a consultative approach that joined agility with data-driven audience insights.

A human-centric methodology, coupled with a hybrid scaled agile delivery model, informed the collaboration. Moving rapidly from strategy to business case, we quickly expanded the vision into market offerings. From this phase, the Cognizant team delivered a range of solutions.

Today, a jointly managed Innovation Hub continuously looks into ways The FA can use next-generation technologies and exciting partnerships to form more personalised relationships with fans and participants.

Solutions to inspire and reach fans everywhere

With these offerings, The FA can engage audiences in novel ways that anticipate their wants and build lasting connections:

- Englandfootball.com** incorporates **Find Football**, an AI-powered tool to find play opportunities for all, including club, casual, women, youth, men, children and people with disabilities.

- My England Football rewards programme** connects commercial partners to fans and delights them with offers and opportunities. It is The FA's new direct-to-fan brand and a new home of English football online.

- FA Women & Girls** is a digital product designed specifically to increase the participation of women and girls in football by sharing engaging content and signposting opportunities to play football for girls from all backgrounds and abilities.

Georgina Lewis, head of marketing at The FA, says, "It's been a really significant shift becoming direct to consumer, enabling us to understand who the audience is, what their drivers are, what their motivations are, and what content lands really well with them."

Pursuing the beautiful game

An adage used by players and fans alike, football is "the beautiful game" because it is quite simply, beautiful to watch. The following solutions help The FA enable others to follow, play and engage with football, as it manages and delivers the game to all:

- FA Match Day** helps grassroots teams orchestrate a football game from a smart device on match day, allowing players, their parents, referees and managers to all connect centrally, pick a team, make a formation, share the game venue and timing, take payments, and ensure players are registered with FA and under no disciplinary sanctions.

- FA Full Time** is the online league tracker tool that supports development, competition and engagement across teams, clubs and regions. Managers, scouts and officials can share and monitor results, game statistics, league positions and match reports.

- FA Events Management Tool** designs, configures and manages football competitions, cups and leagues across The FA, including grassroots games from walking football to Wild Cats girls' football or The FA people's cup.

- England Supporters Club** is for fans of the stadium experience, providing a knowledge-sharing hub, helping facilitate travel, ballots and ticketing news for England matches all over the world.
- FA Boot Room** inspires coaching potential as a teaching and learning hub for referees and coaches, with training content, courses, events and coaching news geared to supporting development.

The following solutions help The FA streamline operations:

- FA Platform For Football** is a re-architecting of the core grassroots football administration system to be an agile, service-based solution designed around the business needs of the staff and volunteers at The FA who manage operations, from communication and finance to discipline and registration. The next-gen platform expects to manage over 1.5M players in 2020-21.
- FA Service Delivery Support**, provided by Cognizant, stretches across the technical estate and has streamlined end-to-end IT support operations. Vastly improved IT service levels have resulted in customer satisfaction ratings rising from 71% to 94% within 12 months. The County CEO feedback in particular (measure of service to 50 different county FA's) increased from 5.6 to 8 on a scale of 1 to 10.

Business outcomes

The results of this work have been remarkable, with players, managers and football administrators now able to organise games through a single app. It's clear that football's multi-level participants are better served through targeted propositions that make football events easier to manage and run. More than 40,000 county teams use The FA Full Time solution, and FA Match Day is the biggest app serving the affiliated game.

A digital first, accessible and inclusive football experience delivers Football for All. The programme exceeded its key objectives in many areas, including:

- England Football.com** launched in May to announce England's Euro Squad line up resulted in 278,000 unique users and over 450,000 page views.
- FA Match Day** has generated over 150,000 downloads and boasts 68,000 weekly users. Nearly 1,700 clubs have set up accounts to take payments from over 80,000 players—double the expected target, saving hours of effort every week.
- FA Full Time** has generated over 48M page views and signed up 2.2M users, with over 40,000 county teams across England, resulting in a 17% increase in traffic year-on-year.
- The England Supporters Club** has set records on all KPIs, including increased engagement (1.1M page views), 118,000 users and a 25% increase in youth registration for England Supporters Club and ticket sales.
- Just Play**, the earlier generation of "Find Football," attracted over 90,000 footballers who wanted to simply turn up and play the game.
- Wildcats**, just one initiative aimed at encouraging young girls to join football, has had over 60,000 new joiners.

Cognizant and The FA's shared vision is making football easier to find, participate in and run, inclusive of all genders, ethnicities, abilities and disabilities, to reach all footballing appetites and ambitions.

The digital transformation journey has improved and extended football experiences, opportunities and engagement "FOR ALL," making real The FA's vision and mantra. The association is now poised to remain relevant to people's football lives, to understand, anticipate and meet their needs.

Sharing his view on the implementation, Jon Pollard, head of product management at The FA, says, "What Cognizant have done is mobilised in partnership with us a whole set of skills that has allowed us to engage directly with all the participants in the game, from players to coaches, fans and parents. It's allowed us to gain a huge amount of value from that real direct relationship that we now have, which we didn't have in the past."

About The Football Association

The Football Association is the governing body of association football in England and the Crown dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey, and the Isle of Man. Formed in 1863, it is the oldest football association in the world and is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the amateur and professional game in its territory. To learn more visit www.thefa.com.

About Cognizant

Cognizant (Nasdaq-100: CTSI) is one of the world's leading professional services companies, transforming clients' business, operating and technology models for the digital era. Our unique industry-based, consultative approach helps clients envision, build and run more innovative and efficient businesses. Headquartered in the U.S., Cognizant is ranked 185 on the Fortune 500 and is consistently listed among the most admired companies in the world. Learn how Cognizant helps clients lead with digital at www.cognizant.com or follow us [@Cognizant](https://twitter.com/Cognizant).

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