

FAN DATA: THE FINAL FRONTIER

Understanding those that love your club, league or country using the information they provide is still an undiscovered opportunity according to those who have helped The FA build their grassroots connections through data.

WORDS MARC WEBBER IMAGES COGNIZANT/THE FA

Football clubs, associations and leagues are not sweating their assets smartly enough when it comes to data offered to them by fans.

As those that love a team or player engage through multiple digital connections, they are leaving breadcrumbs showing what they want. But the sport is missing those clues and some easy wins in enhancing fan engagement.

Even your average small grassroots side will generate hundreds of different connections with supporters every month - that can turn into hundreds of thousands a week for top flight clubs. Having the insight on how to separate their different stories out will lead to upselling opportunities for sides, players' representatives, and sponsors.

"Every business in the entire world is making the shift to



"Football is competing for our free-time attention against the likes of TV streaming services and traditional entertainment events. Companies operating in that space like Netflix or retailers are very good at using data from their 'fans' to offer other things with them which they might like.

"Whilst football has made great strides in using analytics and using administration data in a smart way, there is still a journey to take to make data work well

are will allow The FA to offer more bespoke content from their favourite England player and that will strengthen the relationship - both emotional and transactional - between The FA and that individual."

Through a long-term partnership with England's administrators, tech company Cognizant has been able to build that strong data relationship from the bottom-up, when it relaunched its digital offerings for grassroots football team

understanding the fans that follow those teams.

"One of the first things we did with The FA was map out all of its stakeholders because it's a complicated sport. There are so many different stakeholders, and everybody has a different objective when it comes to what they want out of the game.

"You can't just have a single strategy to communicate with everybody. You will alienate people. You'll make it confusing to find information. That is why anyone who has a fan base in football needs to understand the nuances each different fan has and help them get that relationship with you."

So, does that mean hiring more spreadsheet wizards or data analysts, as opposed to players or coaches? No. It's more about a change in mentality and leaning on the robots, according to David.

"Teams, leagues, players need to develop a data mentality. If you have the desire to be curious about how data can enhance what you know about individual fans, technology can do the big work of splitting out that data and facilitating bespoke messaging to fans."

"It's a virtuous circle. If you take care of the fans, they're going to spend money on the sport, which brings cash in. That allows you to make investments, whether that be in stadiums or players. And then the sport gets better."

"Whilst football has made great strides in using analytics and using administration data in a smart way, there is still a journey to take to make data work well for the supporter experience"

owning all its conversations with the consumer. Football is no different," says David Ingham, Client Partner at Cognizant, which has worked with The FA for a number of years to rebuild their data systems to help grassroots teams to complete association paperwork and training.

for the supporter experience.

"Not every fan is the same. For example, with England's national team, there will be fans who support England as a country, but there will also be fans who support England and like Harry Kane. Being able to segment that data so we know who the Harry Kane fans

players and organisers. The new app was more intuitive and engaging for kids and its game management service aimed to make it easy to submit paperwork and forms for league management and results.

It is now expanding its work with England Football, where its focus is switching more into

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