CHAPTER 4 - Case Study: UEFA GROW

With 55 national associations belonging to the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), there has never been a greater need for a clear, centralised growth plan. With 16 million players in Europe and armies of fans all over the world, the use of data-driven processes is essential to supporting both targeted communications and increasing engagement for local associations, and UEFA as a whole.

Noel Mooney is the Head of Business Development for the National Associations Division at UEFA and is responsible for the rollout of UEFA GROW, a support programme designed for all of UEFA's member nations. The programme relies on four key business objectives, or pillars:

1.   **Image:** nurturing the public image and perception of the game.
2.   **Engagement:** reinforcing engagement with the football family at a local and international level.
3.   **Participation:** increasing and retaining participants of the game at all levels.
4.   **Revenue:** increasing the commercial revenue of all member associations.

In an interview on September 13, 2017, Mooney described the UEFA GROW programme to me and talked about the way data is used to support both UEFA's delivery of the programme and the way the member associations use it.

"UEFA GROW is our vision for how we can support our 55 national associations to increase the love for football across Europe, based on consultation and working closely with our members. We will support the national associations to create a clear marketing growth plan."

WINNING WITH DATA

By utilising these four pillars, UEFA GROW hopes to achieve the development of robust marketing plans to back the member nations in their business objectives, supporting their goal with work streams that cover brand communication, strategic planning and public affairs.

Within UEFA's National Associations Division, the term CRM is replaced with FRM, with the 'F' representing not fans, but football, (and understandably, removing the reference to customers – have you ever met a football fan who wants to be called a customer?) The 'F' represents the whole of the football family, from grassroots players and volunteers, coaches and referees to national team ticket-buyers, sponsors, media partners, even local governments who play an important role in donations and funding for many local football initiatives.

FRM and data are crucial in achieving UEFA's aims for the growth of football across Europe. They allow for informed and supported decision-making, highlight clear markets to inform targeted communication and allow for increased engagement with the national associations' fans both at home and abroad.

For the time being, UEFA is utilising FRM in its **participation** and **engagement** pillars, encouraging its members to analyse and generate actionable insights. This data reveals challenges but also highlights areas of great opportunity that can be maximised across different business areas.

Some national associations are already quite advanced in this area, but UEFA GROW aims to support all associations, even those who are still in the early stages of this approach.

Focus on Participation

Traditionally, football clubs and leagues have focused on sales rather than engagement. Sales might include match tickets or shop merchandise; however, for the national associations, this is not always the best way to foster fan relationships to a sustainable level. For governing bodies of the sport, Mooney believes that the focus should naturally be on participation rather than sales. The associations are, after all, responsible for the growth and reputation of the sport in their respective countries.

That isn't to say that revenue isn't important, but it can be seen as an end rather than the means. The more people who play football, the more individuals who are engaged and interested, the more revenue will come as a by-product.

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As we've already demonstrated in this chapter, there is a relationship between playing football and spending money supporting football. Collecting data and analysing it helps to support this. Other businesses have embraced data as a way of creating actionable insights, and Mooney believes the sports industry should move in the same direction to create a sustainable business that can continue to develop and expand.

Achieving Growth

The FAF (Football Association of Finland) gives a perfect example of growth achieved through data and insight. Mooney and UEFA GROW helped FAF implement a strategy that would allow it to send targeted messages to the fans that engaged with the national association.

Email marketing was a digital channel not previously used by the FAF, which Mooney encouraged it to use, while simultaneously looking at its participation data to understand how its players were registered and what activity was recorded.

Despite not previously having needed them, the FAF had been collecting email addresses from all registered participants. These records were then integrated into its email-marketing database, along with match ticketing and online store sales data. What this showed was a fantastic overview of how their registered players were engaging with them, and what kinds of relationships were being fostered. This data could help the FAF understand if its players both played and watched matches, whether they spent money while following football, and how much they were spending. In turn, this enabled them to begin sending out targeted and personalised emails.

The first three email campaigns were issued in November and December. Rolling out the new campaigns so close to the Christmas period had an enormous impact on the size of their databases, and Mooney stated that the fact they had never before directly addressed their fans was instrumental to their success. These email campaigns achieved 400% of their annual sales targets for the online store, while also getting more players to register.

"At a time when structured sport is facing a decline, [the FAF] managed to not only achieve their annual growth target of 6.5% but exceed it and deliver an 8% growth in registered footballers."

The FAF has continued its email campaigns, sending out an email once every two weeks and supplementing it with targeted campaigns for specific projects and events.

Player registrations are personalised with reminders to re-register two weeks in advance and, for those who still haven't registered, sending out a reminder the day after and again two weeks after the registration date.

Consistency in approach is key to email marketing, and personalised, targeted messages helped produce this outstanding result. Implementing this new data stream was relatively straightforward and, according to Mooney:

"The key was to get the FAF using email and their data in the first place and, once we did this, the results they achieved led them onto further developments."

Changing Culture

Getting associations to change the way they operate is one of the biggest challenges for Mooney and UEFA GROW. It is a common problem across many industries that work with participation, not just sports. The departments that deal with participation often work separately from marketing and sales teams, so it has become imperative for UEFA GROW to address FRM as a cross-organisation strategy, rather than an initiative belonging to a single department

"I guess our situation is no different to an international company with country offices, all of whom are using different systems and processes to do the same job. Within UEFA GROW we're aiming to understand these differences so we can help them progress."

The ultimate goal is to have a full audit of people, processes and systems in place among all 55 of UEFA's national associations. Mooney aims to have UEFA operating under a system similar to Gartner's CRM Maturity Model tackling activity, pursuing tactical objectives, implementing strategy and ultimately linking their business strategy to the realisation of their goals and objectives.

"[UEFA GROW] will help us be more strategic about the support we give our members, ensuring our investment is spent in areas of greatest need across all their different business units."

Not only will this help develop grassroots participation like playing, coaching and refereeing, but will also branch out to see gains in ticketing, online merchandise sales, sponsorship and marketing.

Source: (Mooney, 2017, September 13)

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