

CHAPTER 4 - Case Study: Derbyshire County Cricket Club

Derbyshire CCC (County Cricket Club) is one of eighteen first-class county clubs that play within the structure of the domestic game in England and Wales. In March 2017, Derbyshire CCC appointed Sportego, a Dublin-based consultancy, specialising in fan engagement in the sports industry, to design a personalised communication strategy with the creation of key supporter personas at the heart of it.

In a telephone interview on January 18, 2018, Chris Airey, Media and Marketing Manager of Derbyshire CCC, talked to me about the process they used with Sportego's support.

“We started with six years of ticketing, merchandise and membership sales data that was audited and normalised to enable the creation of a Single Customer View. Once that was in place, the data was then analysed with specific focus on the timing and types of the ticket purchases.”

“We then looked at any possible factors that could have affected ticket sales such as the competition format, the weather, and the day and time of the match. We even looked at how, if at all, the team performance at the time affected our fans' loyalty – we looked at any relationship between our sales and our results.”

Specific attention was paid to new fans; how they were captured, the type of tickets they purchased, the games they attended, and the timing of their purchases. The RFV analysis, described in chapter 4, was applied with specific focus on the results for lapsed fans. The records were cleansed against the UK PAF (Postal Address File), a database owned by the Royal Mail that provides all known postal delivery points in the UK (30 million addresses and 1.8 million postcodes). Running a database against PAF returns a file of addresses in the correct format as the process detects and corrects corrupt or inaccurate records.

Once cleansed, Derbyshire's database was then matched against Acorn, a UK consumer classification segmentation tool developed by CACI, a global IT consultancy firm. Acorn stands for A Classification Of Residential Neighbourhoods, and is based on the premise that people living in similar areas generally present similar lifestyle and spending habits. Acorn classifications are created by analysing demographic data, social factors, population, and consumer behaviour to provide 6 categories, 18 groups and 62 demographic types. In the end, Airey achieved an Acorn match rate of 94% with useable classifications for 83% of their database.

"Thanks to our fast start it meant that just two months later we were in a position to create 6 key customer personas, using our supporter behaviour as one of 3 to 6 key attributes. For personas with 3 or 4 attributes, there had to be a 75% match rate for fans to be allocated that persona – for personas with 5 or 6 attributes they had to match the 2 key attributes and 2 of the remaining 3 or 4. One of these was "Friday Night Out", fans who met at least 3 of the following: they previously bought tickets to a Twenty20 Friday match, a Limited overs/one day Friday match, matched the key age profile of 18 to 35, and fell into the Acorn group that identified younger sports fans. Given the different formats of cricket that we compete in, we used these as one of the key attributes and unsurprisingly, T20 was the most prevalent."

Airey agreed that the use of customer personas increased the efficiency of Derbyshire's approach to personalised and targeted campaigns, both through email and direct mail, and will continue to build on them to create segments based on loyalty and longevity.

"Now we have a greater understanding of who our supporters are and what they look like, and have created these personas that aid in the way we refer to them, we can start to expand on new areas of opportunity such as pulling supporters in from neighbouring counties. One of our next stages will be to get a clearer view of the influence team form and weather has on them. We're also looking at stadium entry mechanisms to build even further on these personas."

Airey and his team learned a lot going through this process, and while he concedes not everything they did was executed to perfection, he's pleased with the approach they took, using both Excel and Alteryx for data processing, and Tableau for analysis and visualisation.

"The results speak for themselves. We achieved the most advanced sales ever in the club's history and we had the earliest ever advance sell out for a T20 match. We also saw the highest ever average attendance across T20, an 11% increase, as well as the highest ever aggregate attendance – 33% increase on last season."

This was the first time Derbyshire had used data-driven insights to formulate their marketing plan, and to use personas in their first project was a great achievement. With a record year behind them, and a renewed contract with Sportego, Airey will build on what they've achieved so far, continuing to deliver personalised campaigns that add impact and increase their conversion rate.

Source: Airey, C. (2018, January 18). Telephone Interview.