

How City Football Group and SAP Manage a Winning Combination

The Premier League in the United Kingdom is one of the world's most lucrative football leagues; a number of its clubs are now recognized as global brands with loyal fans worldwide. With television rights bringing in large sums of money, the pressure on teams to do well and to produce consistently winning performances is constant. To be crowned Premier League Champions has significant financial rewards attached.

City Football Group (CFG) is a global operation consisting of four different clubs: Manchester City (men and women), New York City FC, Melbourne City FC, and Yokohama F. Marinos. With eight offices operating in seven countries, effective management information is essential. The Group has significant trophy-winning aspirations, but it realized that simplifying its operations and scaling the business while enhancing its fans' experience required a technology partner. SAP was chosen as the preferred technology partner and official provider of a variety of cloud-based solutions.

With the strategic aim of growing its business activities, CFG required systems that provide accurate information for people working at different levels within the organization regardless of location. There was also an emphasis on enabling standard back-end operations key to any successful business activity, such as HR, procurement, finance, and operations. To facilitate the work of managers and coaches, match-day preparation also includes access to statistics on not only the Club's players but also on opponents. SAP's Challenger Insights provides data on opposing teams to help with this preparation; the cloud-based technology identifies patterns of play and formations and also provides a visual perspective. This is available on tablets in the Manchester City locker room so players and coaches can make any necessary adjustments to the game plan. The SAP Analytics Cloud contains detailed game data gathered over a period of time within a database that can provide access to required statistics and informative content

Fan engagement is also pivotal to business success. In 2016, the Premier League's first fan-friendly, interactive digital wall was unveiled: #CityPulse Wall, located in City Square at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, was powered by the SAP HANA Cloud Platform. This zone comes alive on match day, providing a social hub for fans, with pre-match entertainment blending a physical environment with digital updates and supplementary content. Digital content needs to

be engaging, informative, and meaningful wherever it is displayed, so the backend systems that CFG has invested in through its partnership with SAP give the content team access to data that can be converted into accessible, user-friendly information. When a data-driven environment captures large amounts of data from various touch points, outlets for sharing that data with fans must ensure that relevant information is provided at the right time. Through access to the various databases, the content team can send out detailed player analysis and relevant statistics as well as produce informed items on player performance in a format likely to appeal to fans.

Manchester City, or "Man City" as it is more commonly referred to by its "Cityzens," has grown to over 250 fan branches worldwide. Of course, only a limited number of fans can actually attend the live games, so provision has to be made for a positive digital experience for those fans following online. The Amazon Prime documentary *All or Nothing: Manchester City* provided fans with a behind-the-scenes view of the 2017–18 season. A Man City Cityzens digital membership platform, a virtual reality app and a free app-based platform for Man City kids, was launched in April 2018 specifically for a target audience of children aged 7 to 11 to help secure the next generation of fans. Since the team was crowned Premier League Champions in 2017–18 and broke a number of records along the way, it is expected to continue consolidating its position in both the Premier League and European competitions and to meet the expectations of its global fanbase. With fans' appetite for current data likely to increase, the CFG will no doubt continue to make innovative use of technology to match expectations both on and off the pitch.

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *What systems does CFG use, and what do those systems offer the Group?*
2. *What is the role of information systems in CFG's success?*
3. *How does innovative use of digital technology encourage fan engagement?*
4. *What is the role of technology in enabling CFG to grow the fan base?*