

# Growing your Community Sports Club Business



## Overview and the Value of your Community Background Notes

### Overview

The tough economic climate is causing problems for Sporting Clubs across Ireland. The amount of money available through grants and sponsorships has been dramatically reduced and there is increased competition for those funds that do remain. There is also competition for the “leisure Euro” in the pockets of the consumer which affects the number of spectators, members, customers for merchandise and participants for the club events.

The clubs therefore need to ensure that they are “professional” in their approach towards these “customers”, especially if they want to be in front of the competition. The club needs to think and act as a business. It is essential for the club to ensure that any customers they do have are offered customer service in order to retain them (since the value of a customer over several years is huge and the recruitment of new members is far more costly both in time and money), that they have good communication channels with all existing and potential customers (to build loyalty and target sales) and above all they strive to understand the “wants and needs” of their customers.

By adopting this “professional” approach it will assist the clubs in becoming sustainable. However, it doesn’t alleviate their main problem of only having limited resources and because of this the club will need to ensure that it plans well and it optimises its resources.

This is achieved by ensuring that the “team off the field” is skilled, that each person understands what their roles and responsibilities are in the business plan. The team also needs to understand that anyone spending money with the club is a customer who has “wants and needs” and that they are valuable to the business.

Who are the clubs customers? Anyone who the club influences to spend money with them or influences them to be a participant at the club’s activities, is a customer. They have chosen to spend their money or time with your club rather than another club. This will include spectators, members, volunteers, and participants for the events, families who send their children to the holiday courses and businesses who use the facilities or provide sponsorship.

### The Value of the Local Community

Each club sits within a Community which is made up of several thousand people. For example the catchment area of Coolmine RFC is around 15,000 and the catchment area of Sligo is around 20,000. Within these communities are the potential customers for all of the clubs “products” including participants, businesses who might hire the facilities or sponsor the club, individuals for events, families, members and spectators. The club needs to ensure that it is “visible” within the community and in order to optimise the potential of the community and it needs to focus on the following;

**Brand Awareness** – do all of the individuals living in your local Community know of your existence and what you have to offer? Many clubs work hard creating Brand Awareness in their local community through some of the following activities;

- Claremorris RFC takes part in the annual St Patricks day parade – last year they performed the Haka along the route of the parade. They also give all of their mini section a branded fleece which they wear around the town,
- Volunteering to steward local events such as discos, carnivals and processions. Killarney man a water station at the local marathon and steward a hole at the local golf tournament.
- Putting up banners in the community and promoting events and fixtures in the community
- Working with the local press to get coverage for all sporting and community orientated events

**Building the Clubs Reputation** – does the club work in the local schools, does it offer support to local Charities or does it provide its facilities at a reduced rate for worthy causes? Coolmine for example run a fund raising event for the local Hospice and this

[http://www.irishrugby.ie/club/welcomingclubs/welcoming\\_clubs\\_index.php](http://www.irishrugby.ie/club/welcomingclubs/welcoming_clubs_index.php)

*IRFU Welcoming Clubs Programme; An IRFU initiative which provides clubs with a road map and training for the “team off the field” to assist them in running their sports club as efficiently as possible.*

relationship can work both ways since the Hospice has a data base of people who can be invited to the clubs events (the Hospice could be paid a commission on every ticket they sell). A wide range of clubs also have a coach in the local schools providing access to quality coaching for the children and creating a pathway through to the club.

**Communication Channels** - If your club is going to communicate with its local community then it needs to establish good communication channels. This could be via e mail, text, web sites, social media, posters or banners. If you don't let your potential customers know you are there and that you have an event/facilities etc. that they may want to buy then they will spend their money with your competitors.

**Data Bases** – in order to communicate with your existing and potential customers you need to have their contact details. It is essential that the club collects data at every opportunity of anyone that comes into contact with the club.

**Active selling** – the club needs to actively work within the community selling all of its products. They can't simply "hope" that someone will come to watch a game, take a sponsorship or come to an event. They need to understand who the potential customers are and actively try to influence them to "buy" what the club has to offer.

### **Summary**

The clubs local community is a "reservoir of potential customers" for all of the clubs products. The club needs to be visible within its community and work to develop reputation and communication channels so that it can access this customer "reservoir".

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