IBM

Chelsea Football Club teams with IBM to score big with e-business.

The popularity of soccer, as it's called in the United States, or football as it's known to the rest of the world, is growing around the globe. One team benefiting from this gain

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—Chris Manson, Managing Director, Chelsea Village Communications and Merchandising

in popularity is the Chelsea Football Club (Chelsea FC), or "The Blues" as they're affectionately known. Chelsea FC is one of the most popular football clubs in Great Britain and has fans in countries such as France, Romania and Nigeria. In an effort to protect its brand and offer broader services to its customers, it has become one of the first football clubs to launch an e-business Web site. The site offers distinct areas where fans can get the latest team news and obtain ticket information, purchase Blues' merchandise from the Internet Megastore; and get travel information on the Chelsea Village resort, which offers four restaurants, conferencing and banqueting facilities, a major retail outlet and a sports and leisure center.

"The inspiration for the site was twofold," explains Chris Manson, managing director, Chelsea Village Communications and

Application	Internet site for marketing promotion and online merchandise sales
Business Benefits	Merchandise sales up 25% over next 12 months; club inquiries increase 37%; strengthened Chelsea brand
Software	IBM® Net.Commerce IBM DB2® UDB IBM HTTP Server
Hardware	IBM RS/6000® IBM AS/400®
Services	IBM Global Services

Chelsea Football Club is using IBM e-business technology to strengthen its brand and provide supporters with the service they deserve.

IBM *(e)* an e-business solution ▶

Merchandising, "Unofficial sites developed by hobbyist fans were starting to spring up. It was important for us to curb development of these sites to protect the Chelsea brand and to give our supporters the kind of service they deserved." During the 1997-98 season, 35,400 seats were sold for nearly every Chelsea FC game. The club expects this number to leap to 45,000 for the 1999-2000 season. With this 37 percent increase, supporters are likely to turn to the Web site more and more for ticket information and support. The site also offers a potentially huge source of revenue for the club and, according to Manson, plays an integral part in its latest $255 million investment project, Chelsea Village.

Chelsea reaches club supporters worldwide

Chelsea FC's Web site offers the perfect way to reach the club's growing supporters both locally and worldwide, as proven by its many hits per day. Thirty-five percent of those hits come from sources outside of the UK, confirming the club's international appeal and loyal following. Those visiting the Web site can gather up-to-the-minute information on match results and players as well as participate in live chat discussions. The site also has an e-mail feedback form, offering a way for supporters to provide input and take part in the decision-making process at the club. But it doesn't end there.

The Chelsea FC Web site provides online access to ticket information and the ability to securely purchase its full line of merchandise. Since the Web site's inception, overall sales have increased 5 percent. Chelsea FC predicts that merchandise sales will increase 25 percent over the next twelve months since fans can shop from anywhere around the globe 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. "The key is the flexibility that e-business provides. It allows us to offer a 24-hour, 365-day service to supporters all around the globe," says Manson. Additionally, in the near future, Chelsea expects ticket sales to be fully purchasable online.

Choosing the right solution

Chelsea FC developed high standards and tough criteria for the company vying to provide its technology solution. IBM was the only company that could satisfy all of Chelsea's requirements, beating 100 other interested parties to the post. It had already provided Chelsea with the hardware for its IT system, so the club knew that IBM could deliver. IBM Global Services hosts the entire Web site on an IBM RS/6000 server and is responsible for site maintenance and RAMPS — Reliability, Availability, Management, Performance and Security. Additionally, IBM Global Services maintains the electronic commerce components, which include the Internet Megastore. Chelsea's in-house Web team manages the content updates for the team information as well as the Chelsea Village area.

According to Manson, "Credibility was an important factor to us, so the supplier had

As Chelsea FC's popularity continues to skyrocket, the club knows its e-business solution will keep pace, taking it well into the next millennium.

to match the kudos of the Chelsea brand. This requirement meant choosing a service provider that we could rely on to provide excellent levels of service. IBM matched that description."

Chelsea chose IBM DB2 Universal Database (UDB) for its price and performance. DB2 UDB offers Chelsea the scalability to handle the site's full range of applications from high-performance decision support to online transaction processing (OLTP). Additionally, IBM HTTP Server adds security, indexing capabilities and advanced server statistics reporting — all necessary to run Chelsea's large scale operation.

It takes TALENT to manage a football club

Chelsea chose Computer Software Limited's (CSL) TALENT Arena Management package to allow its back-end systems to interface with its front office application. For example, if the ticket office has a customer with an address change, that change will occur in the marketing, accounting and merchandising systems as well. "I think we're very unique in that no one else has taken interfaces to that extreme," says Alison Dalrymple, the product manager for CSL. "There might be an upload and a download, but in our case it is all in realtime."

Another use of TALENT is in the management of ticket sales. When seating is limited during popular matches, Chelsea rewards its most loyal supporters by ensuring ticket availability. Anytime a ticket is purchased, Chelsea's ticketing system assigns a unique reference number. This number is then stored in a DB2 database, linking the names and addresses of ticket purchasers to their ticketing information. Chelsea's ticketing system prevents fraudulent activities such as the purchase of multiple tickets by one person for resale at a higher price.

Using IBM DB2 database software and an AS/400 system, TALENT serves both front-end and back office functions, providing both the customer interface and the overall core system. TALENT also integrates with and enables other technologies, such as smart cards and loyalty schemes.
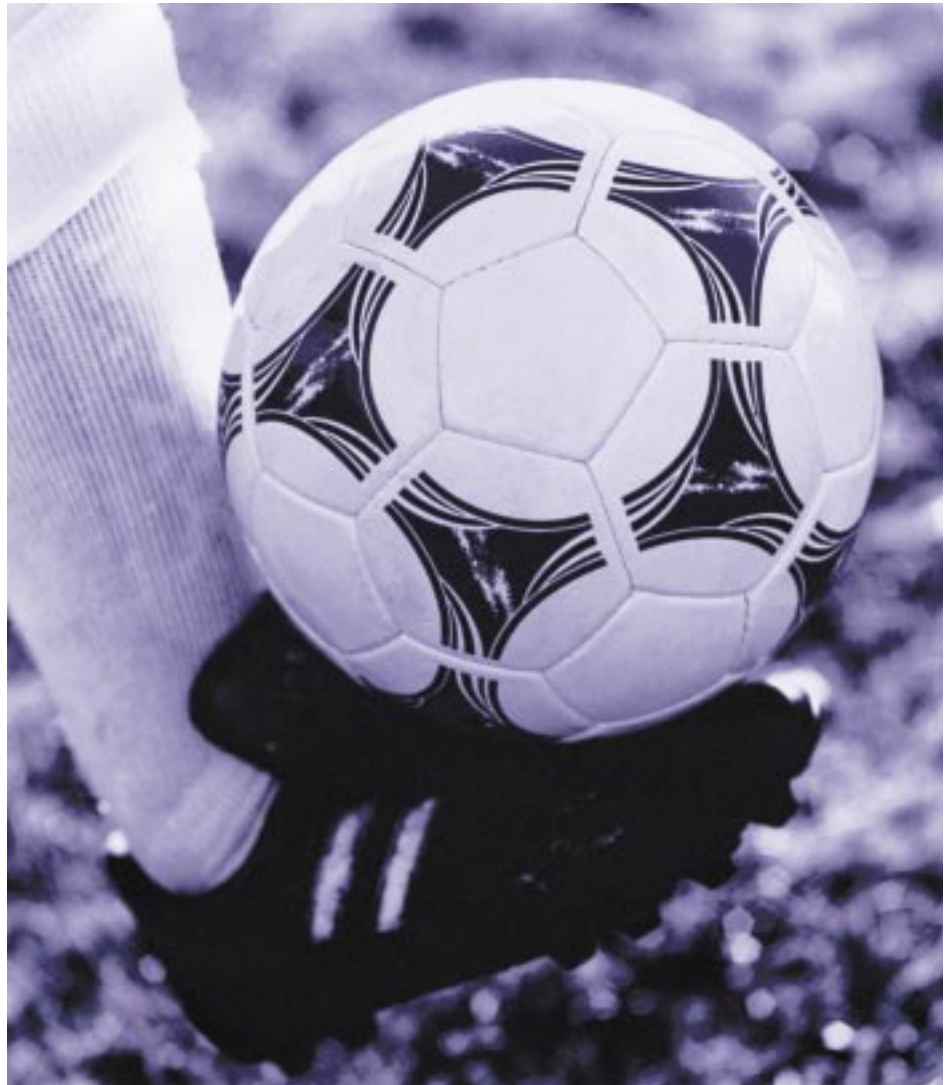
Chelsea incorporates TALENT management, packaged with IBM DB2 database software to ensure tickets are available for loyal fans.

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Scoring goals with electronic commerce

Chelsea FC has initiated a full-scale effort to provide better services to its fans and to develop a unique brand on an international level through the power of the Web. Chelsea FC crafted an e-commerce strategy to bring previously outsourced merchandise sales in house. With the help of IBM Global Services, Chelsea FC designed an e-commerce site based on Net.Commerce, the IBM HTTP Server and DB2. Chelsea FC's fans can purchase everyday items such as team jerseys through its online Megastore, as well as pacifiers, bedding, wallpaper, clocks and even wine, all sporting the Chelsea FC logo. The increase in sales through the Internet is significantly over and above its traditional catalog sales.

Using store creation templates and wizards, available through Net.Commerce, Chelsea created its Megastore in record time. The IBM HTTP Server provides credit card transaction security through Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption. It translates requests from the Internet and sends them to a DB2 database where product information is stored. Once consumers have selected items for purchase, they enter their credit card information into a secure Web browser form and submit it for authentication. After the credit card information has been verified, the order is processed, and the merchandise is shipped.

Continuing excellence in customer service

While its growing popularity continues to cause seats to be sold out years in advance, Chelsea FC plans to make acquiring tickets much easier for fans, while reducing its own infrastructure costs. It is also adopting a Web advertising strategy that will further increase service while keeping additional advertising costs in check. With many more plays up its sleeve, Chelsea FC is scoring big in the e-business game.

"This IBM e-business solution is the most advanced system of its type we've found," concludes Manson. "It is fully integrated, tailored and configurable to our needs. It can handle every aspect of our business and is fully scalable. As Chelsea grows, so will the system — easily and painlessly."

For more information, please contact your

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For more information on the Chelsea Football Club, visit:
www.chelseafc.co.uk

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