Baseline

How the NFL Is Using Business Technology and Information Technology Together

By Dennis McCafferty
2008-08-29

Behind the excitement and glamour of the football season is some key information technology including: GPS, ecommerce, wired and wireless networking, voice over IP, and project management-- that support and enhance America's favorite sport. Companies such as Cisco, Insight, Ignify, Microsoft and KORE Telematics are helping NFL teams get serious about managing information technology in logistics, customer relationship management and securely storing team and media-related data.

As in most years, the 2008 Super Bowl was a star-packed event, with Eli Manning and the New York Giants going up against Tom Brady and the undefeated New England Patriots. At halftime, rock icon Tom Petty took the stage.

Falcons Expect E-Commerce Boost

For the Atlanta Falcons, a major overhaul in brick-and-mortar operations—the warehousing of the team's considerable fan merchandise inventory—led to a significant upgrade of its e-commerce Web site operations this season. The team launched a shift in warehousing operations, resulting in the need to reintegrate all items with Falcon logos—T-shirts, jerseys, footballs, key chains and even those big foam fingers fans wave at games—with the team's Web site.

"Once we examined this," says Don Norton, manager of business information systems and executive support for the Falcons, "we saw how extensive and expensive it would be to custom-develop [such an application]. So we looked for an IT company that could integrate with our systems as part of its out-of-the-box offering." That's where Ignify, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, stepped in—not only to serve these integration needs, but to provide a new online product catalog, storefront and business-commerce platform for the Falcons' 365 online store. Thanks to the integration, the Atlanta Falcons' marketing and promotion departments can more effectively gauge sales trends—such as targeted promotions, real-time inventory reports and key metrics like site visits, visitor browsing history, clickthroughs and customer purchasing patterns. Search-engine optimization is also part of the package, increasing the Falcons' odds of coming up on top of the Google charts when fans type in phrases like "Atlanta Falcons gear."

As a result, the Falcons are expecting a considerable uptick in online sales as the season gets under way. With the selection of top-pick quarterback Matt Ryan of Boston College, there's a hopeful buzz about the team's future. When fans go to the Falcons' site to snatch up, say, a jersey with Ryan's name and a big #2 (his official team number) on the back, they'll have a much-improved user experience to get to the point of purchase.

"It's much more fan-friendly than the previous site, which has been in use since 2005," Norton says. "The new site has much easier navigation—it's more like what you see on larger e-commerce sites like Amazon." The site features better merchandising and reporting, with more information about a fan's past purchases and what that fan may want on the site now. Also, when fans buy gift cards in stores, they can use more than one card for a purchase online, which wasn't allowed before. The Ignify solution also boosted anti-fraud tools. "This new site will help us to engage our fans and keep them engaged year-round," Norton says.