

# IRFU Welcoming Clubs Programme



## Case Study #6: Railway Union RFC

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

Twelve months ago Railway Union RFC was a club in decline. Only one team represented the club and Railway Union RFC, a club with an illustrious past was in danger of going “out of business”. However, a group of individuals came together with a “vision” of how a club should be run and as a result the club has run two teams this season (the expectation is for 5 teams next season), it has attracted over 45 volunteers and they expect well over 120 people to attend the end of season Dinner Dance.

How did they achieve this and which lessons can be learned and used (when appropriate) by other clubs?

Fundamentally they decided that the club needed to be run as a business and they state in their web site that “in order to survive, we need to view ourselves as a business”. The main aim was to make the club sustainable with systems, procedures and processes in place to ensure that financial, player and volunteer resources would be available in the future.

As a business they created a “vision” of where the club wanted to be after one year and then after three years. A plan was developed which was considered to be attainable with the resources available and 7 key goals were set.

In order to achieve these goals a Governance structure was developed which included individual roles and responsibilities for each person. The individual “committees” were therefore left to achieve their goals; they met when they needed to and only came together to report or to review progress.

The club recognised that they needed to sell the club to new players, coaches, members, supporters, sponsors and volunteers. The focus was then on developing an understanding of the wants and needs of each of these “customers” in order to sell the club to them. As an example they recognised that young players enjoyed their Friday night out and Saturday was a time for families when players who had young families were needed at home. Therefore they have decided to play games on Friday or Saturday nights which will allow their players to fulfil other needs as well as playing rugby!

Events became a key activity in achieving the “vision”. Not only did they provide a social aspect to the club but they were also a “tool” which could be used to build the reputation/ brand of the club.

Finally, communication was also a key factor in the plan since it was a “tool” which could be used to sell, inform, build the brand and promote the events.

### **Developing the Rugby Club Business**

- The “vision” for the first year was created which was SMART – specific, measureable, attainable, resourced and time framed. The seven goals they set were;
- To establish a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> team that played on a regular basis
- To win their division
- To create a social element to the club with an event at least every 6 weeks
- To increase membership by at least 20%
- To re-engage with former members
- To put floodlights onto the pitch
- To promote and repair the brand
- To give players and members the opportunity to learn and develop as people through rugby

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In order to achieve the “**vision**” in an amateur environment but with a “**professional**” attitude everyone in each of the “**committees**” has their own roles and responsibilities within the plan. By running the club in this way the aim is to allow people to be involved without overburdening them or completely monopolising their time. The view of the club is that if “**the critical parts of the club work together efficiently, effectively and in one direction**” the vision can be achieved.

As the season developed more volunteers were attracted to the club and they now have a range of “committees” working including Executive, Rugby, Social, Legends, Finance and Admin, Fundraising Promotions and Marketing, Player Welfare and Underage. When searching for new volunteers they have created job descriptions which outline the roles and responsibilities of the position.

The Key aspect of the plan is the need to attract the “**right**” people to the club, both on and off the field. This has been achieved by focusing on the wants and needs of the specific individuals. There is a section on the web site which is titled “**Why join Railway**”. We have already highlighted the fact that the club will play its games next year on a Friday or Saturday night to allow fathers to have time with their families and young players to have their “**night out**”. In order to achieve this one of the main goals was to get floodlights at the club and this was achieved with the assistance of a low interest loan from the IRFU. The list of benefits provided to players includes quality facilities, quality coaching, one hour technical player development skills coaching every week, a social programme, an opportunity to work with the local community and “**active participation and work experience opportunities to develop your management, professional and people skills in a professional setting**”.

**If you are a volunteer they offer you the opportunity to;**

- Develop a circle of friends outside of your normal environment
- Engage in the local community and networking opportunities that may assist in work
- Achieve a sense of achievement in your local community
- “An opportunity to work with the local community and “active participation and work experience opportunities to develop your management, professional and people skills in a professional setting. Working with achievers in many areas of business and the community you will get guidance and feedback. This can be added to your CV and give valuable work experience in an area you might want to break into”

This approach has proved to be extremely successful and the club has attracted over 45 volunteers within the first year.

Events are a key tool in achieving the goals. The aim of running events isn’t simply to generate income. The events are used to build brand, to build reputation, to attract new members or sponsors as well as fulfil the needs of the existing members. Each event has a well laid out plan, the individuals involved know what their responsibilities are and they are measured.

**Examples are outlined below;**

- **School Rugby Sevens Tournament** – run to build brand and awareness of the club
- **Ladies Day** – 50 ladies were attracted to a day of fine food and wine. This was run to build awareness and the brand
- **Tag Competition** – this was run to attract players, to build brand and to build reputation
- **Legends night** – the aim of Legends initiative is to tie the players to the club when they finish playing through the provision of business network opportunities and social opportunities. On the night that the floodlights were officially “switch on” 45 players took part in a game against a veteran’s team from Perpignan. Over 300 people turned up for the evening and many of them for the first time in many years.
- **Christmas Carols** – on the day that Leinster played Bath over 40 individuals took part in 4 hours of Carol Singing at venues around the Aviva Stadium raising a substantial amount of money as well as it being a great “social occasion”.
- **Take a Model to the Dance** – this initiative aims to build up awareness for the club, to build awareness about the Diner Dance and to drive numbers on Facebook. There are a group of players and members on the web site who are competing to “take the model to the Dance”. Anyone can go onto the Facebook site to vote for which person they think should win the competition. Within a couple of weeks of being launched it generated a huge amount of publicity, interest and new people linking to the Facebook page.

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There is a Social Plan on the web site outlining all of the events that are planned for the year. As well as the above there are **Quiz nights, Poker Nights, Race nights, a comedy night, Kinsale sevens** and an **overseas tour**.

### **Communication**

All of the above activities are under pinned by communication strategy for which Social Media is a massive focus. The face book page is very active but there is a growing emphasis on Twitter and LinkedIn.

### **The Future**

All of the goals for the first year have been achieved already. The new vision is being developed for the next two years and will include areas such as data base development, community involvement and the development of an under 20 team in partnership with the local college.

### **Key Points**

Every club has different resources and therefore they may not be able to embrace all of the concepts in the depth that Railway Union have. However, these Key Point do fit with the Welcoming Clubs programme and should be considered (resources allowing) to be unitised in all clubs at one level or another.

- **View your club as a business**
- Build up a **vision/plan** for your club which is **SMART** – specific, measureable, attainable, resourced and time framed.
- Ensure that everyone within the club knows what their **roles and responsibilities** are within the plan.
- Attract players, coaches, families, sponsors, members, supporters, volunteers through;
  - An **understanding** of their wants and needs
  - Developing marketing communications that offer each one of the above an opportunity with you to fulfil their **“wants and needs”**.
- **Plan events well** and ensure that everyone involved understands the outcomes to be achieved.
- **Communication** – build up strong communication channels with a focus on social media. **Data collection** a key aspect of this process

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