The National Hockey League® (NHL®) is partnering with SAP to optimize the experience of fans through its digital platforms. Solutions and services from SAP help the league engage its fans through more relevant marketing and vivid, interactive online statistics. Richer profiles of individual customers equip the NHL® to glean insights into their specific behaviors.
Executive overview

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

Objectives
• Grow the National Hockey League® digital platform
• Better engage fans with personalized and relevant marketing content and messages
• Increase fan engagement and fervor around the game by providing better statistical visualizations of player and team performances
• Target specific fan demographics for outreach

Resolution
• Partnered with SAP to build fan interest and enable better storytelling
• Presented hockey statistics in interactive ways fans have never seen before
• Focused on understanding fan profiles

Benefits
• Built a richer customer profile, with deeper insights into each fan’s behavior
• Improved Web site visitors’ experience
• Made boosting fan engagement and fervor an in-house capability
• Increased database efficiency with faster response times

“We were thrilled about the way fans reacted to our new statistics section and how much more intelligently we’re now able to market to them. It shows what we and SAP can accomplish by working together.”

Chris Foster, Director of Digital Business Development, National Hockey League®
Making statistics exciting and valuable for marketing

The National Hockey League® (NHL®), the premier ice hockey league in the world, comprises 30 teams representing major North American cities. The league attracts the best players from all over the world and has rabid fans everywhere.

The NHL® knows that hockey fans increasingly use the Internet, mobile devices, and social media to interact with their favorite sport. Realizing that it had to take better advantage of digital channels to engage fans, the league made it a top priority to increase its use of multimedia, expand its social platforms, focus on mobile areas, and revitalize its Web presence. The NHL® knew how powerful the right platforms can be not only for increasing fans’ interest but also for tracking their online behavior. Armed with insights from analysis of individual fan profiles, the league knew it could market to them in a much more relevant and timely manner.

Recently the league recognized that one area was being underserved: statistics. “A big reason why we hadn’t done more with statistics is the perception that they’re boring and therefore wouldn’t bring in new fans,” says Chris Foster, director of digital business development for the NHL®. “Then we realized that statistics don’t have to be tedious, static numbers in columns. If presented in exciting ways, they can be very powerful attractions to fans. But we also realized that to do that we needed the right kind of partner.”
Creating a highly personalized, interactive fan experience

The NHL® found just the partner it was looking for in SAP. “SAP software provides a vast array of tools for bringing our statistics to life as well as a willingness to truly partner with us to get the most out of them,” explains Foster. “One tool is the SAP HANA database, whose speed and power allow us to manage our huge volume of numbers and still enable fans to do filtering and searching fast enough to have an outstanding experience getting the information they want.”

The NHL® is using the SAP HANA® Enterprise Cloud service as the back end of its statistics section. The SAP® hybris® Marketing solution equips the league to gain key insights into every single fan and offer up relevant content and messages to successfully connect and engage with them. The NHL® had an aggressive implementation schedule so it used the SAP hybris Marketing rapid-deployment solution, which was key to getting the job done quickly and efficiently. “We can now target specific demographics with an exact scalpel,” Foster remarks.

Beyond the tools, one of the great appeals of the partnership was the people at SAP and their ability to help the NHL® reach its goals. The Global Service & Support organization from SAP worked closely with the league to redesign the statistics section of NHL.com. They started with a clean slate and no preconceptions, asking fans what they would like to see in the way of statistics. They created the new solution iteratively, repeatedly implementing features and checking with fans until their reaction was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. “I invite anyone to check it out at NHL.com/stats,” says Foster. “It’s so intuitive – that’s all you need to know.”
Giving the fans what they want

Fan reaction to the first release of the new online presence the league engineered with SAP’s help was outstanding. In the very first week, overall fan engagement jumped by 25% and has been rising ever since as word spreads among hockey fans about all the highly interactive features on NHL.com and how they can customize the site to focus on their own favorite players and teams.

Despite this success, the league solicited extensive feedback from fans asking what could be done even better. Then the NHL® and SAP teams put their heads together, addressed the feedback, and made improvements that swelled the site’s popularity. Fans are now spending an amazing 45% more time on the site than before the launch. They are performing more queries and in general are much more engaged.

“I think a big part of our success comes from the Run Simple mentality at SAP,” says Foster. “Hockey is the fastest game on earth, too fast sometimes for people. SAP is helping us slow down the game for fans, giving them new ways to look at stats and new ways to analyze and get insights about our players and teams. Our partnership is also helping the league itself improve on its business. It’s given us the tools and ability to understand audience behavior, what fans want, and smarter ways to have conversations with them.”

“SAP is helping the NHL® improve its business by saving time, saving costs, and delivering a best-in-class product to our fans.”

Chris Foster, Director of Digital Business Development, National Hockey League®
NHL.com – the innovations are just getting started

The NHL® has many exciting plans to build on these successes. Experts from the league will soon be working with data scientists from SAP to deep-dive into all the data collected to date to perform predictive analysis of fan behavior.

Another major project will be to integrate into the database all historical information going back to the league’s formation in 1917. This will allow fans to compare performance of present-day stars or teams with their idols and favorites from decades ago using tools specially designed by SAP to account for the fact that many of the statistics collected today were not recorded in years past. In fact, even the statistics collected today may pale compared with the future, when the NHL’s® imagination is further unleashed by the new capabilities made possible by SAP.