

Recruitment and Retention – Play 2011

Campaign Rationale

The RFU has adopted a four year planning cycle to support the development of the grass-roots game. Within this cycle, Rugby World Cup marks the strategic focus for the recruitment and retention of players. The RFU's Third Strategic Plan states an aim to increase adult participation in clubs by 37% (36,934) over the plan period.

- 1.2 In 2007, the national recruitment campaign 'PLAY' was launched by the RFU. The largest sports campaign of its kind, PLAY became a significant success, exceeding targets and expectations. The campaign helped to bring 9,865 lapsed players back into the game, an average increase of 12 players per club. PLAY proved the value and the impact of delivering a centrally controlled and structured strategic campaign.
- 1.3 As a natural extension to PLAY, the RFU then turned its strategic focus to another significant challenge to the growth of the game—player retention. The Play On campaign is designed to address player drop-off as students move on in their rugby journey between school, higher education and onwards. Through a dedicated network on the ground (O2 Pathfinders) and a supporting awareness campaign, the Play On is creating valuable connections between players and rugby institutions.
- 1.4 The RFU are now considering the most appropriate strategy to grow the game during the next recruitment and retention cycle in 2011. In line with the RFU's strategy, the key themes of recruitment and retention will be combined into a single two year programme. Using the research, knowledge and good practice developed through both programmes, the most powerful aspects of PLAY and Play On will be re-defined into a single national campaign initiative.
- 1.5 Equally the RFU is seeking to establish how any campaign or programme will develop towards 2015—England's greatest opportunity to increase participation in Rugby Union and create a legacy.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Targets

- Increase the number of adult club teams by 1 new team for every Section 1 club, over the Plan period.
- Increase adult participation in the game by 36,934 over the Plan period.
- Increase the number of teams in each university and college by an average of one and half teams over the Plan period.
- Increase the number of players at colleges and universities by players by 23,497.

2.2 Campaign objectives

The management and delivery of the campaign will directly support the RFU's key strategic themes.

- To reinforce and promote the core values of the game, and in particular demonstrate the commonality of the values across all levels of the game.
- Establish a model for collaborative working between RFU and PRL.
- Enhance the image and reputation of the RFU.
- Establish the RFU as the leading NGB in player recruitment and retention.

2.3 Target audience

The target audience for the campaign has been determined as 16 years and over, men and women. The recruitment and retention priorities for each club will be determined by individual, local needs through a supported process.

Current players and lapsed players represent a primary focus, but the campaign will also seek to attract players new to the game.

Whilst full-contact 15-a-side male rugby is a primary growth target, all forms of the game, for men and women will be targeted.

KEY STRATEGIES

3.1 Principles

The overarching strategy will comprise of two areas:

- A centrally co-ordinated national promotional campaign; to promote the game and drive the audience towards clubs.
- Direct and tailored support to the club network to facilitate activation on a local level.

This approach represents the core structure proven during the 2007 PLAY campaign.

3.2 National promotional campaign

The national campaign will promote rugby as a sport of choice, reinforce advocacy in current players and drive potential participants to clubs. A high profile campaign, that leverages the increase in exposure around Rugby World Cup, will create the powerful backdrop for club's local activity. National activity has been proven to motivate clubs and stimulate high-involvement in the campaign.

The national campaign will focus on the core values of the game and the wide-ranging benefits of participation. The overarching campaign direction will represent all aspects of the game and its participants, focusing on inclusivity and diversity, rather than specifics.

The core elements are described below.

3.2.1 PR and elite endorsement

At the heart of the national activity, a PR strategy will seek to maximise the interest and appetite for Rugby related coverage. The integration of the elite players is vital for a number of reasons:

Their 'voice' creates the access to mainstream press and media. Endorsement and advocacy of professional players as role models is a powerful motivator for a significant demographic.

It provides the opportunity to present all levels of the game working towards a common goal.

In addition to the International team, the campaign will seek the direct involvement from the Premiership teams. This important element of the strategy will:

- Extend the potential reach of the campaign
- Significantly strengthen regional activity through club and player endorsement
- Enable access to resources to strengthen the activation platform
- Actively demonstrate a united game—club and country

This activity supports paragraph 200 of the agreement between RFU and PRL. Premier Rugby are engaged in the campaign development process and will continue to be integral moving forward.

3.2.3 Events programme

A major summer events programme will contribute to the campaign objectives on a number of levels:

- Large scale events attract significant national and regional media coverage.
- Provides activation opportunities for campaign messages, data capture, sponsor engagement.
- Out of season playing opportunities are provided that help sustain interest during a critical time of influence for players on the move.
- Alternative/leisure formats of the game are promoted, which reach both current and non-participants.
- Offers local clubs a platform for promotion and engagement with the campaign.

Both PLAY and Play On campaigns have integrated the O2 Scrum on the Beach programme. It is envisaged that major events of this nature will continue to be a core element of the 2011 campaign. In addition, the RFU will seek to extend the reach of the events programme across England through a smaller, but more accessible, regional programme.

3.2.4 Online and digital marketing

Online activation of the campaign will be central to the campaign, due to an unrivalled level of accessibility to the target audience. We will seek to incorporate the following communication channels and resources to support the campaign objectives:

RFU.com will be a central destination for information and resources for the audience and those key individuals supporting the campaign directly. It is envisaged that the campaign will have a dedicated presence within the main RFU website.

A concept for a dedicated online tool to assist in creating and maintaining player connections has been developed. This could provide a vital resource to support O2 Pathfinders in the effective delivery of their role.

Online direct marketing, utilising existing RFU channels will be adopted as a primary communications vehicle.

Integration with Social media websites will be explored to gain maximum advantage from these major audience gateways. Integration with Sponsor or Partner online activity

3.2.5 Purchased media

Although it is envisaged that the majority of focus for campaign promotion will be delivered through PR, opportunities to extend the reach of the campaign through print or broadcast media will be explored. The cinema advertising campaign and press promotion in 2007 created huge value in credibility and exposure, in addition to developing unique opportunities to obtain below the line coverage.

3 Club support

The proposed strategy is dependant upon the direct and proactive involvement of clubs.

3.3.1 Participating clubs

Access to support will be made available to all clubs in England who demonstrate an appetite for involvement.

It is envisaged that Clubs will be required to develop a specific action plan for the recruitment and retention of players as part of their Whole Club Development cycle. This will form the basis of the club's 'Opt-In' for the campaign. This activity will be facilitated by Community Rugby's RDO network.

3.3.2 Club campaign teams

Clubs will be encouraged to formalise a Recruitment and Retention Team that includes specific roles to fulfil the delivery of the campaign at a local level. At a minimum each team will include an O2 Pathfinder and a lead-individual to act as co-ordinator and communications point. The activation of these teams has proven vital in motivating and mobilising a club's activity.

3.3.3 Tailored promotional resources

Based on the success of previous campaigns, it is envisaged that clubs will have access to a suite of promotional materials.

Each club will be targeted with achieving 1 more team. How this is defined for each individual club will vary between types of players and forms of the game. The focus will vary between the need to recruit or the need to retain a few vital individuals.

As such, the aim is to provide a tailored approach that will enable clubs to select the message and medium that works for their own needs. This is intended to apply to printed, online or rich-media assets. This approach will provide for a consistent and controlled campaign at both national and local level that is targeted to club's specific needs.

Clubs have indicated that more direct support for their own web presence would be of significant value. This may be achieved on a number of levels, from the enhancement and promotion of the RugbyFirst website builder to provision of assets to support their activity.

3.3.4 Education and Training

The investment of direct training support has been identified as a key pre-campaign activity. The following groups and applications have been identified as priority targets:

- RFU Stakeholders
- Regional Development Teams
- Club Campaign Teams
- Referees and coaches
- Club volunteers

Development plan and priorities

The following key aspects will be explored in full during this initial planning phase:

- Commercial and sponsorship strategy
- Event logistics and viability
- Online and website strategy
- Club development planning
- Training and education requirements
- Brand and campaign identity direction
- Project planning and dependencies
- Budgeting and funding
- Campaign measurement

Following approval of the strategy and core activity, the management team will develop a full project plan and begin the build towards implementation throughout 2010.

CAMPAIGN IDENTITY

5.1 Direction

A key consideration to be resolved in the initial phase is the lead campaign identity. The current situation is as follows:

PLAY as a name and identity received a significant level of recognition and traction during the 2007 campaign.

The RFU corporate brand will require significant presence in the campaign.

'This is Rugby' is a new campaign identity developed by the RFU to promote the core values of the game. The values represent an underpinning message for the national campaign, but may not have the direct and active core message of Play.

The inter-relationship between the positioning of these identities is not only vital to this campaign but also to the integrity of the RFU's communications strategy.