



BATTLING FOR A LONG INNINGS

Data Infosys found that 'bigger the better' is not always true

By Radhika Nallayam Illustration by Unnikrishnan AV

IS A bigger margin the only factor that decides the merit of a project? For Jaipur-based Data Infosys, that definitely was not the case. And, it was this mindset that helped the company bag one of the highest-profile projects in the history of Indian cricket — the revolutionary online ticketing system for Rajasthan Cricket Association (RCA), which helped boost the image and overall standing of the SI. The competition for bagging this deal was fierce as large national SIs aspired to be a part of such a project. But the story had an unpredictable ending with Data Infosys easily clinching the deal. Today, the SI is content about its decision to look beyond mere short-term monetary

benefits of a project.

When RCA decided to have an IT implementation partner, their requirements were not very unusual. They wanted a company that could set up a Wi-Fi network within the stadium and also provide connectivity in RCA's offices. However, the association did not offer a great remuneration for its IT partner. RCA wanted to have some sort of a barter system, wherein they offered their IT partner an opportunity to showcase its brand outside the stadium. They were also ready to offer the partner facilities within the stadium, along with a few complimentary passes for cricket matches.

While this was not an attractive deal for many, Data Infosys found value associated with it. And because of the relative unattractiveness of the deal, the company didn't have to face competition from larger SIs, who otherwise would have won this deal at any cost, due to the sheer allure of the game. Besides, the initial requirements of RCA matched up with the core expertise of Data Infosys. The SI is one of the largest ISPs in the country. "We are the eighth largest ISP in the country and moreover we had the track record of executing many major projects in Rajasthan. Our eligibility and credentials were much better when compared to other players who bid for the project. We also had the required infrastructure and resources," says Nitin Walia, Director of Data Infosys.

However, Data Infosys knew that things were not going to be easy. "We knew that we were going to take a huge business risk, as we were sure our margins would almost be nil. But it offered us many other benefits in terms of greater visibility, reputation, and improved foothold in the market. RCA promised us an opportunity to display our logo at the premises of the stadium. The fact that all 30,000 spectators would see our branding and would know about Data Infosys was exciting. It was in fact a priceless deal."

Data Infosys signed a memorandum of understanding with RCA as its IT implementation partner for the next four years with an assurance

Case File

Key parties: Rajasthan Cricket Association, Data Infosys

Major activities: Website designing, Online ticketing system, RFID integration, Authentication and access control system, Building database

Location: Jaipur, Rajasthan

Total Cost of implementation: Rs 30 lakh

Returns: Improved visibility, better branding, ensured business for four years

Key people involved: Nitin Walia, Director, Ajay Data, CEO-Data Infosys, K. Narasimha Rao (IPS) and Security Advisor RCA, Sanjay Dixit, Secretary of RCA, C P Joshi, RCA president

that the SI would be used for all the upcoming IT projects that would be taken up by RCA during that period.

MORE IN STORE

What seemed to be just another networking project turned out to be a one of its kind project in the history of Indian cricket. Sanjay Dixit, Secretary of RCA, had more plans for the ODI match between India and South Africa which was to be held in Jaipur in February 2010. He wanted to stop the black marketing and fake generation of tickets. Besides, there were threats of terrorist-attacks during the match and RCA had the biggest responsibility of ensuring the security of all the spectators.

Though RCA did not have a clear idea on how these issues can be tackled, Dixit was sure about 'going online'. RCA put forth its requirements to Data Infosys and the SI came back with a very innovative blue-print.

"We proposed a plan to overcome these issues and came up with a unique model that probably no cricket association had done so far," says Walia. "Data Infosys had a very good understanding about our requirements. They put in more effort in studying our needs and coming up with a cost-effective solution," adds Dixit approves.

The SI developed a completely new website for RCA and came up with a unique online booking engine integrated with an online payment gateway, through which all the tickets were to be sold. "For the first time in the history of Indian cricket, no counters were opened for selling tickets. RCA started selling tickets as early as 21 days prior to the match. It was a record as sales would usually open two or three days prior to the match," adds Walia. The SI also had the responsibility of managing the online bookings and sending across the tickets to people. The system also ensured authenticity of tickets and helped RCA in curbing some of the long-standing issues like black marketing as the tickets were made non-transferable.

Another challenge was to ensure security and Data Infosys played a key role in designing a new authentication and access control system. The company introduced RFID technology and integrated RFID cards to each ticket. This ensured that only people with valid tickets would be allowed inside the stadium. Besides, the online ticketing system allowed



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■ CASE STUDY

RCA to have a huge database that contains the details of each viewer as Data Infosys went one step further and made it mandatory for people who book tickets online to share their identity and mobile phone numbers. Besides, the online ticketing system allowed RCA to have a huge database that contained the details of each spectator. To ensure better security, the visuals from the CCTV cameras that were installed inside the stadium were integrated to the database of viewers. Thus, Data Infosys had the huge task of literally managing the whole event without any loopholes.

NEW CHALLENGES, NEW LEARNING

“New challenges, New Learning It was one of the most challenging projects for Data Infosys for many reasons, says Walia. The SI had to do a lot of things that it had never done. “It was a project of huge scale and we had to stretch ourselves to the limit. The first challenge was the timely delivery of tickets to people, because online booking was happening for the first time,” says Walia. The company allotted more manpower to carry out this work effectively.

Besides, Data Infosys had the task of setting up the access control system and managing the entry gates to ensure smooth entry of all the 30000 people into the stadium. “All we got was just 48 hours to set up the access control systems and other equipments within the stadium. On the day of the match, we were more hard-pressed of time. We just had three hours in hand to make the entry of 30,000 people, and that too, without any lines and stoppages. Most of us in Data Infosys worked sleeplessly for three continuous days,” adds Walia.

The company did require a lot of manpower to make this possible and it decided to take help from RCA’s security agency. It took on a few people from the agency and jointly formed a team of 80 people to perform the chores. Data Infosys trained the team members, especially the RCA agency members, on the access control system and how

DEFYING RESISTANCE

NEW ideas are not always easily accepted, especially when they have the power to change existing systems. When Data Infosys took up the project for RCA, Nitin Walia knew that he might be facing his toughest customer yet. “The committee had about 50 members and none of them supported the idea of an online ticketing system. Some of them were of the opinion that a few tickets should be sold offline. They also insisted on making the tickets transferable. But that would not have served the purpose of curbing black marketing,” says Walia.

Sanjay Dixit and Data Infosys also had to face the wrath of people who did not want to let go of the ‘opportunity’ associated with black marketing and fake ticketing. They were subjected to bad mouthing from many sides, including the negative reports in some sections of the media against the project. As a result, the issue even gained national attention.

Fortunately for Data Infosys, it had the strong support from Dixit and CP Joshi, RCA President and Union Minister. “Joshi went through each and every detail of the project and was convinced about its advantages. With the support of RCA’s top officials, we decided to go ahead with the project,” explains Walia.

However, Walia and his team then had to take up the huge responsibility of creating an unfailing system. They decided to leave no stone unturned and thus prepared to give an errorless pilot project of all the technologies that would be used in the final match. “We did the pilot during a state cricket tournament where we gave out RFID integrated tickets to 1,000 invited guests. Thus, we were able to prove that the entire RFID access control system was efficient enough and could handle 30,000 people,” says Walia. With improved confidence and support of the RCA members, Data Infosys managed to come out with a high score.

the RFID cards can be read using the readers. They were also trained on collecting back the RFID tags without any damage and how all of these can be done without any time lag. On the day of the match, a team that had a few RCA agency members and an employee of Data Infosys was appointed at each entry gate to manage the admission of spectators. This

way, Data Infosys ensured all the gates were managed effectively.

Systematic approach helped the company in doing something that initially seemed ‘impossible. The project necessitated an investment of Rs 16 Lakh from Data Infosys. “The total cost of the end-to-end project was only Rs 30 lakhs, which included the RFID cards and readers that were bought by RCA. I can confidently declare that a large national SI would not have done this project without offering a few Crores!,” says Walia.

He, however, is happy that the project helped them learn a lot of new things and get greater visibility in the market. “Our association with Data Infosys has been excellent so far. They are very proactive and go out of their way to complete a work. They never did penny-pinching and went ahead to invest money whenever it was required,” Dixit endorses. RCA has further plans to enhance the authentication and access control system and is confident that it would be safe in the hands of Data Infosys. ■



“They took time to understand what our requirements were and put more efforts into studying our needs and reaching a cost-effective solution.”

SANJAY DIXIT, SECRETARY,
RAJASTHAN CRICKET ASSOCIATION