Case-study

Ox Tales: Supporting Safer Stadia

Delivering an effective and compliant football banning scheme, enhanced safety management and general administrative cost-efficiencies

SUMMARY

Football clubs across the country have supporters who are subject to either a banning order, imposed by a court or by the club, or a behavioural contract.

The management of these bans or contracts constitutes a club's 'banning scheme', the purpose of which is to encourage the good behaviour of their fans.

Similar schemes operate in more than 300 UK towns and city-centres where local groups of retailers or licensees do the same by banning individuals responsible for repeated low-level crime and anti-social behaviour from their premises. They use the DISC online system from Littoralis to manage their schemes cost-effectively, efficiently and in compliance with important legal obligations.

This case-study describes how Oxford United Football Club (OUFC) set up *Ox Tales: Supporting Safer Stadia*, based on Littoralis' DISC system, used it to manage and support its banning scheme as well as other safety and security functions at home and away, and delivered other important cost-reductions and benefits.

***Ox Tales* operated as a Pilot Project throughout the 2016/17 football season, following which it has been adopted as a permanent feature of OUFC's safety provision.**
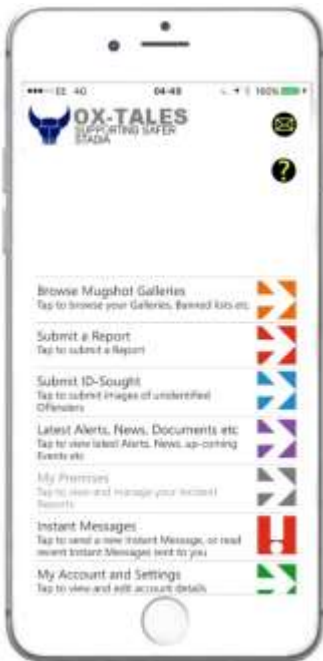
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INITIAL PROPOSAL

Littoralis first approached OUFC in February 2016. At that time, the club was contending for promotion into football's League One so it was not until June, with Oxford's promotion secured, that Littoralis set up an online demonstration of its DISC system for Oxford United's senior safety team.

Ian Mixter, then Deputy Safety Officer at Oxford, could see the potential for DISC straight away. "My overall goal was to improve the safety of those who attend our fixtures, and I immediately saw the potential of DISC to support my work, plus assisting at other stadia where OUFC played."

Mixter's second thoughts were more guarded. DISC requires an Administrator to manage it, and he had to ask himself if he was prepared to fill that role.

"But", says Mixter "when I actually saw the system and how it worked, I began to feel that it had the potential to be very special". It was a feeling, in Ian's case, based on a long police career much of which was spent in football policing and managing crowded places (see page 3: *Ian Mixter*).

"I believed that Oxford had an opportunity to be in at the start of something that could help shape the future safety of those who attend football grounds. So, in the end, I 'sold' the idea to others at the club - both in the safety team and in management – on the basis that it had the opportunity to be in at the start of something special."

Ian Mixter: "The systems…had the potential to be very special"

The prospect of adding extra pressure to his existing workload was still a serious consideration for Ian: "Learning something new is an investment in time which we can't always easily afford, especially for people who might not be quite as tech-savvy as their kids.

"And DISC is an on-line system so our paper-based data would all need to be moved into the DISC database. So, although we were being offered the system free of charge for the duration of the Pilot Project, I was concerned about the cost in terms of my own personal time."

Finally, although the club had just gained promotion to League One, it was determined to maximise value for money from all areas of its operation. So Ian knew that, if after the conclusion of the Pilot Project, OUFC decided to continue with DISC, it had to clearly demonstrate real cost-reductions as well as enhancements and improvements to ground safety.

DEPLOYMENT OF DISC AT OXFORD UNITED

Deployment of DISC comprised three main phases: configuring the system to work the way OUFC wanted; transferring paper-based information into the DISC database; and winning engagement and participation from those who would use it.

The configuration work was easy, and remarkably quick to complete. "According to the DISC manuals, it takes 90 minutes to configure the system to suit your own requirements" says Mixter, "and I'd say that was true for us."

DISC can be configured to reflect whatever banning scheme is already in place. OUFC's is based on Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs): Offenders who are reported for

anti-social behaviour are required to sign an ABC with the club, and until they do so they are banned from attending all home games. Once they sign their ABCs, if they're reported for further ASB they are deemed to have broken their contract - and are banned from the club for a period dependant on the nature of the original digression.

CHRONOLOGY

25.02.16	Littoralis proposes Pilot Project to OUFC Safety Officer
23.06.16	Online demonstration of DISC to OUFC; OUFC agrees to participate in Pilot Project
09.08.16	First meeting between Littoralis and OUFC
20.08.16	First deployment of *Ox Tales* at OUFC v Peterborough
10.09.16	Disorder at OUFC v Swindon Town fixture; images captured of 10 males of which seven identified and dealt with; separately, one male ejected from ground – image captured and shared with staff within three minutes so that re-entry could be refused at another gate
29.10.16	OUFC v Millwall; flares thrown from OUFC towards Millwall. Slow motion examination of CCTV later revealed three males involved. All later identified on DISC; ongoing through Justice System
10-11.17	Ongoing discussion with TVP re Info Sharing Agreement
12.12.16	Finalisation of ISA with TVP enabling use of *Ox Tales* at OUFC's away fixtures
21.01.17	Rochdale Town v OUFC; first use of DISC at away game
05.02.17	Swindon Town v OUFC; serious disorder in Swindon; images shared with OUFC by TVP via Wiltshire Police – five offenders identified; ongoing through Justice System
05.02.17	Travelling Offenders gallery implemented
02.04.17	Checkatrade Trophy at Wembley with *Ox Tales* available; used by Wembley safety team, English Football League representatives, OUFC staff, Coventry City SO, TVP, BTP & MPS
17.04.17	DISC Damage Reporting function used at OUFC v Port Vale; well-received by ground staff

Relevant Offender Galleries were set up in DISC to match the needs of the scheme. At Oxford that meant separate Offender Galleries for Offenders subject to statutory Football Banning Orders, those subject to club bans, and those who had signed ABCs; other galleries display images of individuals 'of interest' to the OUFC safety team, 'ID-Sought' images, and a Gallery displaying images of Offenders most likely to cause problems at away fixtures.

"DISC itself was very easy to set up to suit our own particular scheme, and it was very easy to add all the logos for the club and Thames Valley Police and British Transport police and so on" says Mixter. "Adding members to the system is also easy and quick – all the Administrator needs is to enter each member's email address into DISC and the system does the rest."

Ian had expected the second phase of deployment – converting paper-based data to digital, and then migrating it from the old system to the new one - to be the most time-consuming. And so it was.

"One challenge was converting our paper-based data into digital format. The other was adding it into DISC. It took some time to get my head around it but Littoralis provided training on both as part of their implementation support. With a little training, it soon became a painless process.

"Right now we have 84 Offenders in our database, all but three of which are displayed in galleries. Once this data is in digital form, it takes between 2 and 3 minutes to upload each Offender. From then on, maintaining and updating existing data etc, and adding new Offenders, takes very little time

"In general I must say that this training was time very well spent; in the end, despite my initial concerns, and once I'd got my head around it, migrating data into DISC was not a big deal. I understand that Littoralis is able to undertake large-scale 'data migration' for larger clubs with more Offenders in their schemes and greater volumes of non-digital data".

The third phase of deployment, and in some ways the most critical, was ensuring that staff used the new system properly, and as much as possible.

For this reason, Ian went for a phased roll-out to staff. "I didn't want them to discard the system at an early stage due to either ignorance or frustration. So, I spent time

with colleagues to ensure they were confident in using it – before letting them play with it on their own."

Any resistance from staff quickly evaporated when they downloaded the DISC App and explored it on their own smartphones. "There is something immediate and obvious about the App which delivers a 'wow' factor" says Mixter. "It's extremely intuitive and easy to use. So, when staff installed the DISC App on their own devices and explored it for themselves, they quickly gained confidence and saw how it could help them in their own jobs.

"Put simply, safety staff and club management cannot get enough of it. Even the staff that were slowest to come round now see the benefits and access the system regularly - I can see that from the logs that I can access as Administrator through the DISC Admin Centre.

"Our Safety Advisory Group Chair and our Sports Ground Safety Authority Inspector have access to the system too, enabling them to access relevant data and documents direct to their smartphones, where and when they want it. And of course, like all other members of DISC, the system keeps them always up-to-date with relevant security and safety news, documents and alerts".

OUFC's system went live as Ox Tales: Supporting Safer Stadia *in August 2016*

DISC went live at Oxford as *Ox Tales: Supporting Safer Stadia* for the first time at its home game with Peterborough United on August 26th (a 2-1 win for the home side). On Day One it helped stewards identify a fan who had been made subject to an ABC, to confirm that the ABC had not yet been signed (contrary to the assurances of the individual) and to require that the individual vacate the ground immediately. The fan complied – and subsequently duly signed the outstanding ABC the following week.

The match was also the first opportunity to assess the *Ox Tales* App's performance on match day in terms of 'contention' issues. The App uses 3G and 4G (or, if available, WiFi) for wide-area connectivity and, with 7,000+ fans attending the Peterborough fixture, no contention issues were reported. Indeed, through the rest of the Pilot Project, no connectivity issues were ever reported - even at the largest attendance of the season when Oxford contested the Checkatrade Trophy final with Coventry City at Wembley Stadium in April 2017 in front of 74,434 fans.

WORKING WITH POLICE

"Obviously, we work closely with Thames Valley Police officers who access the system as do our colleagues in British Transport Police" says Ian Mixter. "They too can see the benefits"

OUFC works closely with police match-day commanders and police intelligence officers or 'spotters'. Currently five officers are permanent members of *Ox Tales*, and for individual home matches Mixter can add other officers, such as the match-day commander, as 'Temporary Members'.

One unexpected benefit of implementing DISC at OUFC was a general tightening up of existing information sharing arrangements between the club and Thames Valley Police.

Sharing personal data of Offenders between police and football clubs requires a formal Information Sharing Agreement (ISA) – usually drawn up by the police. However, in setting up DISC's sign-up process for members (a completely online process which requires no activity on the Administrator's part) it became clear that TVP's ISA with Oxford United was not fully up-to-date and required some revisions.

"Lots of discussions took place" explains Mixter, "which eventually resulted in a redrafted ISA which was then signed by OUFC and TVP. As a result, the police themselves adopted more secure means of sharing personal data with the club – which was absolutely vital if we were to work as closely as we needed to with the police - but in a manner which is compliant with the Data Protection Act and Best Practice, as well as with the police's own internal processes.

Also, it was only when these issues were resolved that we were able to share TVP-supplied data with other clubs and police at away fixtures. And that now includes OUFC taking *Ox Tales* 'away' so that our Offender data can be shared on a game-by-game basis with Safety Officers and police at all away fixtures.

"Away clubs and police find our galleries useful for identifying Offenders most likely to cause problems away from home as well as those subject to Football Banning Orders and OUFC bans. By distributing this information on match-days through the *Ox Tales* App on our away visits we have helped our hosts identify these potential travelling troublemakers and reduced potential disorder in their own grounds".

Oxford United's banning scheme is now more effective than ever before. Not only can match-day supervisors and stewards identify Offenders more easily thanks to the App, but they can also check to see if Offenders have signed any outstanding Acceptable Behaviour Contracts. "On the very first occasion when *Ox Tales* was used in the stadium we were able to identify one Offender who had not signed his outstanding ABC, disprove his claim that he had done so, and eject him from the ground; he subsequently attended the club office to sign the ABC.

"There were innumerable subsequent occasions when *Ox Tales* enabled us to more rigorously administrate the existing banning system" says Ian Mixter. "Also, there were a number of disturbances, most seriously at Swindon (home and away) and Millwall, where sharing ID-Sought CCTV images through *Ox Tales* generated quicker positive identifications. *Ox Tales* was also made available to the Wembley Safety Officer and their team and Metropolitan Police football 'spotters' when Oxford United competed in the final of the Checkatrade Trophy where it was used to capture and circulate the image of a violent fan with the result that he was identified within 10 minutes of being placed onto *Ox Tales*. This matter is currently (May 2017) being progressed through the justice system.

There were many other positive outcomes of the Pilot Project: "It forced us to review almost every aspect of our banning scheme" says Ian Mixter. "Before DISC, the scheme was labour intensive and, the more labour-intensive processes are, the more prone they are to inconsistencies. Now, because *Ox Tales* helps us manage the system much more efficiently, not only have we achieved important cost savings in terms of reduced management overhead – but the banning scheme itself is now more robust in terms of compliance with Best Practice and the Data Protection Act.

"Along with OUFC and police, others have also benefitted from *Ox Tales*" says Mixter. "DISC comes with a very efficient and easily managed damage reporting and management system which can be configured by the Administrator to suit the needs of any extensive stadium or entertainment venue. For a football stadium, it is invaluable for post-match safety inspections and damage reporting. And the company

IAN MIXTER

Ian has over 30 years' knowledge and experience in crowd related matters, first as a police officer and latterly in his capacity as OUFC Safety Officer and other roles.

His police work included major incident command, counter terrorism, and search related matters. He holds two degrees in Crowd Safety Management along with Spectator Safety qualifications; in addition, Ian has extensive operational experience and understanding of the management and behaviour of crowds.

Current employment

- Oxford United Football Club - Safety Officer;
- Mixter Associates Ltd – Director of a crowd management, search, safety and training consultancy;

that owns Oxford's Grenoble Road stadium and the neighbouring retail park and leisure facilities benefits from *Ox Tales'* damage reporting system.

BENEFITS

More effective banning scheme

- **Wider and faster sharing of Offenders' details**; sharing of information direct with stewards and stand supervisors meant that more banned Offenders were identified in the ground and ejected;
- **Better 'version control' of ABCs**; offenders who had been served with Acceptable Behaviour Contracts but who had not yet signed them were identified and match-day staff were able to eject them, regardless of claims made by the Offenders that they had signed their ABC;
- **Ability to share personal data in compliance with Data Protection Act** with partners: providing up-to-date data on Offenders to police home and away, and to host clubs' safety teams was possible due to DISC's internal processes which ensured compliance with Data Protection Act etc;
- **Increase in identification of ID-Sought images**; DISC enabled ID-Sought CCTV images to be circulated widely among police and other partners, and generated high level of positive identifications;
- **Sharing of security-related alerts**; *Ox Tales* helped communicate short-term important news or warnings to stewards around the ground;

Ox Tales is easy to set up and manage through the Admin Centre

- **Better distribution of data relating to Offenders subject to statutory Football Banning Orders**; *Ox Tales* has ensured wider distribution of Offender data so that these Offenders can be more effectively identified and monitored by stewards;
- **Automated Offender management**: Offender data is always up to date, galleries are automatically updated with expiry dates etc; easy to 'escalate' an Offender from one gallery to another – for example from 'Subject to ABC' to 'Club Ban'; automation ensures compliance with Best Practice – for example Offenders are deleted from galleries automatically on their **due date;**
- **Sharing Offender galleries with stewards increases Offender identification;** all DISC users can readily access Offender galleries so that there are more 'pairs of eyes' around the ground to identify Offenders;
- **Easy for stewards and other safety staff to submit Incident and Intelligence Reports** linked with known Offenders; increase the level of reporting with the potential to build evidence for a 14B Banning Order application.

More effective management of ground safety

- **Current awareness information is more widely accessible** to more stewards through App;
- **Easy to manage 'Temporary Members'** for example for away matches; easy to provide access at the beginning of the event; easy to deny access at the end of it;
- **Instant Messages**; urgent, important messages can be sent instantly via the *Ox Tales* App to all users, or to selected groups of users.

General management efficiency

- **Tighter staff management** through publishing of events etc through automated weekly eNewsletter;
- **Reduction in paper handling** OUFC prints 75% less briefing sheets per game - and next season OUFC will 'go paperless';

- **Reduction of time spent in briefing, de-briefing and damage reporting;** potential for major reduction in staff/contractor costs;
- **Damage Reporting system saves on radio time and paperwork**; notification to repairers (with Pictures of damaged seats, leaks within the Stadium complex and other broken fixtures) is immediate.
- **Tight control of damage resolutions**; easy reporting to management and contractors.

Other features of DISC

- **Easy to set up**: configurable to suit OUFC's specific needs;
- **Ease of use**; minimal training required; easy to submit info eg ID-Sought images;
- **Accessibility**; the App makes *Ox Tales* accessible where and when it is needed;

COSTS

"We've been delighted with DISC and are more than happy to start paying for it" says Ian Mixter. As a League One club Oxford's monthly Licence is £100. "There can be no doubt that in terms of improved security alone, due to a reduction in risk, £1,200 per year is a small price to pay. But when you add in the reduction of management time associated with the banning scheme, more efficient use of stewards, the greater confidence that DISC brings in terms of compliance with the Data Protection Act and Best Practice, the reduction in paper costs plus an improved fault/damage reporting system, it's a bargain. And the larger the club, clearly, the larger the benefits. "

The cost of DISC comprises

- a once-off Implementation charge of £1,000 to include advice on compliance, Administrator training and hand-holding right the way from set-up to going live; the charge also covers assistance with migrating data from previous systems into DISC;
- a monthly Licence that varies according to the size of the club. For League Two clubs, the Licence is just £50 per month; for League One clubs like Oxford United the Licence is £100 per month; the monthly DISC Licence for Championship clubs is £200; and Premiership clubs pay a Licence of £400 per month. DISC is offered on a 12-month contract.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Oxford United was the first professional football club to implement the DISC system; as more clubs adopt it, the power of the system grows in terms of information-sharing between DISC-enabled clubs.

By linking their systems together DISC Administrators can search across participating DISC systems for Offenders who are known in more than one DISC database – thus indicating travelling, perhaps prolific Offenders. ID-Sought images can be distributed through multiple DISC systems, thus widening their circulation and increasing the likelihood of speedy positive identifications.

'Alerts' can be shared across multiple DISC systems and their security and safety staff – for example to publicise counterfeit tickets, ticket touts, travelling groups selling counterfeit or stolen goods inside and outside grounds, new offensive weapons and methods of concealment, betting scams, football-related on-line fraud and much more.

"I can see the potential for this system" says Ian Mixter "I dream about every club having it!"

CONCLUSIONS

"Even following my initial realisation of the potential of the scheme, I have been impressed by the difference that *Ox Tales* has made to supporting the match-day safety operation," says Ian Mixter.

"I believe the system has really enhanced the performance of the safety team at Oxford, has improved interaction and information exchange with our police partners, has enabled tighter control of in-house and external stewarding staff, and ensures compliance with various guidance documents, legislation and, of course, the Data Protection Act.

"Plus, it has brought a whole range of other efficiency and economy benefits in areas of management quite separate to ground safety. I could see the long-term safety benefits of DISC right from the start – but I hadn't realised how quickly DISC's online damage reporting and paper-saving has reduced our costs, or how substantially. And I can only see further cost-reductions going forward.

"Maybe the best thing about *Ox Tales*, and especially the App, is the 'wow factor' it has created amongst the match-day supervisors and stewards. I don't think you can underestimate that in getting pretty much everyone participating and doing familiar things in a different, more efficient, more effective way.

"I have been especially encouraged by how many people have expressed interest in the trial and a wish to be updated regarding the resultant case study. That includes fellow safety officers of course, but also police officers from across the country - not only Thames Valley Police and British Transport Police, but also the Metropolitan Police as well as Essex Police, Wiltshire and Greater Manchester Forces. Also, staff from regulatory agencies involved in football and others associated with the management of Leagues have expressed keen interest.

DISC

DISC is a secure, online system for crime reduction currently used in over 300 towns and city-centres throughout the UK.

An Administrator manages every aspect of their local DISC system – Offenders, members, incident   and damage reports, 'authors' (members who can assist in administration of the system) and other content such as news, alerts, documents, ID-Sought images and information about up-coming events.

DISC is used to manage banning schemes. Administrators manage their schemes compliantly, efficiently and effectively, and allow members of their schemes to access information about banned Offenders, submit incident reports about them, and access other safety- and security-related content such as news, 'alerts', reference documents and information about up-coming events. Members can also submit reports on incidents, ID-Sought images, and damage, which are send back to the Administrator for processing.

DISC is used to process personal data so it has been designed to comply with the Data Protection Act (and the General Data Protection Directive which will come into force in May 2018). It enables data to be processed, stored and shared more securely, more compliantly and at a lower cost than paper-based systems.

DISC includes essential built-in online communication tools, including a fully automated weekly eNewsletter to all members, one-off emails, emailed Alerts and a secure member-to-members 'Instant Messaging' system available to all members.

DISC: currently in use in over 300 towns and city-centres throughout the UK

DISC is accessible across all desk-top, lap-top and tablet computers and - most importantly for members - the DISC App. The App enables them to access always-up-to-date data and submit reports to their Administrator whenever and wherever they need to..

For Administrators, the DISC Admin Centre provides easy-to-use tools to manage every aspect of their local system including configuring it to exactly match their specific requirements, managing members, content, Offenders, reports and Authors, and accessing extensive analytics to report on member usage and the performance of the DISC system itself.

Each DISC system can be linked together for sharing data on Offenders – useful for identifying travelling Offenders – and for instant 'cross-publishing' of relevant news, and alerts across multiple DISC systems.

Being online means information is held more securely, and can be managed at a much lower cost, than paper-based systems. The DISC App means that members can always access this always-up-to-date information fast and conveniently. Automation of key processes means not only that management of behave and be banned schemes requires less management time (and therefore cost).

But DISC provides schemes with further benefits. In addition to information about Offenders, DISC enables members to submit Incident and Intelligence reports; ID-Sought CCTV images, news of latest relevant security developments, information about up-coming events, access to an online library of reference documents and 'alerts' about matters of immediate but short-term concern. DISC comes complete with a eNewsletter automatically generated and sent to each member every week as well as an Instant Messaging system enabling members to communicate directly with each other about urgent, important matters.

Many DISC systems are linked together to enable news, alerts, ID-Sought images etc to be automatically published across multiple DISC systems, and different DISC systems can link together on a 'peer-to-peer' basis, for the identification of travelling and therefore prolific offenders. Each DISC system is managed by a local Administrator who controls every aspect of the local system - from configuring the system to precisely match the needs of the local scheme and its members, to managing members, sharing information with other DISC systems, and designating 'Authors' to assist with content management.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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