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## The Use of e-CRM Database to Promote a Value-Breeding Bond Network: The Case of Hawthorn Football Club of Australian Rules

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**Abstract**

Hawthorn Football Club is a Melbourne based Australian Rules club had a debt of AU \$1.7 million in 1996. Hawthorn has established a central e-CRM database to progressively achieve their business goals by integrating all of their membership, management, finance, marketing and sales information. Therefore, the e-CRM facilitates Hawthorn to predict the market trend and formulate long-term market development strategies by synthesising the integrated data of Hawthorn's value-network. Today, Hawthorn has established themselves as one of the most financially strong Australian Rules football clubs by transforming its value-network into a Value-Breeding Bond (VBB) network. The aim of this study was to recognise how Hawthorn has been using the e-CRM lucratively to reach at today's financially strong position. The case study approach along with the content analysis of publicly available data, such as websites, annual reports and so forth has utilised in the study. The lesson of the study shows that Hawthorn has been employing information technology supported Relationship Marketing to strategise their dominating business development strategies, by analysing their value-network's data, stored in the e-CRM. Therefore, Hawthorn's value-network turns to a VBB network, where the existing value has been continually breeding further value for its stakeholders and promoting value-network to the next stage of successful value proliferation from the re-productiveness of their mutually beneficial existing relationships value, which is established as a perfect learning of prolific using of e-CRM for transforming a value-network into a VBB network from the context of value-proliferation.

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**1. Introduction**

Hawthorn Football Club of Australian rules has used e-CRM database to rebuild its business operation after the club had a disastrous run [Hill 1] in 1996, when the club had a debt of AU \$1.7 million [Stavros 2]. The e-CRM facilitates Hawthorn to predict the market trend and formulate long-term market development strategies by synthesising the integrated data of Hawthorn's value-network, stored in the e-CRM in the aim of overcoming the debt, and mounting further financial success. Therefore, Hawthorn has been progressively attaining its business goals. Today, Hawthorn has established themselves as one of the most financially strong Australian Rules football clubs [Stavros 2; Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia 3] by transforming their value-network into a Value-Breeding Bond (VBB) network.

From this context, a case study has been undertaken to recognise how Hawthorn has been using the e-CRM lucratively to develop today's financially strong platform. The content analysis of publicly available secondary data such as websites, annual reports and previous studies utilised in this study. The study shows that Hawthorn has been employing Information Technology (IT) supported Relationship Marketing (RM) to strategise their dominating business development strategies, by analysing their value-network's data, stored in the e-CRM. Therefore, Hawthorn's value-network transforms into a VBB network, where the existing value has been continually breeding further value for its stakeholders and promoting the value-network to the next stage of successful value proliferation from the re-productiveness of their mutually beneficial existing relationships value.

**2. Significance of an IT enhanced research and development focused E-CRM database in Hawthorn's growth**

Hawthorn was realised the significance of an IT enhanced research and development focused e-CRM database to establish a dominating business practice, while it was confronting various real-life business problems to overcome its debt. Since 2005, Hawthorn started qualitative and quantitative market research [Stavros 2] to foster development and penetrate new market opportunities. The platform of the research and development practice within Hawthorn was rooted, when they were thinking to invest for a state of the art Hawthorn central IT supported research and development focused e-CRM database to integrate

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member administration, finance, management and marketing information with that of Hawthorn's overall operations in 2003 [Pivotal CRM 4] to progressively score all of their business and marketing goals. John Nugent, Hawthorn's Head of Financial Operation in 2003 explained the necessity of a central IT supported research and development focused e-CRM database as:

We want a solution that has the flexibility and potential to grow with our club, that could integrate into and bring together all our management, administration, marketing and sales data as well as our event management and membership information. We need a complete view of our business and activities — across the board — not just in membership. Hawthorn needs to be able to be much more effective in marketing to members — and that the right CRM solution could play a major role in facilitating that goal. We need to refine our marketing strategies and precisely identify and select different types of target audiences and communicate with these groups in appropriate and compelling ways [Pivotal CRM 4, np].

The initial goals prior to introducing an integrated central e-CRM database were [Pivotal CRM 4]:

- Build long-term customer relationships;
- Ensure scalability;
- Increase campaign effectiveness and customer retention;
- Increase operational efficiencies;
- Integrate existing data;
- Target specific audience segments.

After various stages of transformation, today Hawthorn's central e-CRM database is able to report all of the following issues just by a fingertip [Pivotal CRM 4]:

- Monthly reporting;
- Full transparency of data and of business processes;
- Improved effectiveness of marketing efforts, the e-CRM database helps Hawthorn to:
  - a) Identify potential target market;
  - b) Assess existing market's buying preferences;
  - c) Refine product and services offerings including develop new programs, activities, events, products and services;
  - d) Assess the reasons of lapse members;
  - e) Refine the membership offerings aiming to retain existing members and attain new members;
  - f) Precisely develop sponsorship packages that offer greater value for sponsors and associated stakeholders;
- Increased efficiency.

Based on the central e-CRM database, Hawthorn continues their research and development initiatives and sub-sequent winning market strategies, as Hawthorn has successfully implemented enterprise-wide business automation (computerisation) through the e-CRM database that has provided the club with a significant competitive advantage in the ensuing years [Knowles 5].

### 3. How the Hawthorn's E-CRM works: an example from Hawthorn's business development initiative

Hawthorn has been prolifically employing RM through its e-CRM database, in the aim of developing and managing trusting and long-term relationships with larger stakeholders, focusing on value proliferation in Hawthorn's value-network. Business Dictionary [6, np] defined RM as:

Marketing activities aimed at developing and managing trusting and long-term relationships with larger stakeholders. Customer profile, buying patterns, and history of contacts is maintained in a sales database, and a service representative is assigned to one or more major customers to fulfil their needs and maintain the relationship.

Therefore, the key responsibilities of Hawthorn's Membership and Fan Development Executive [7] are:

- Facilitate website content and social (web 3.0 applications) media strategy to drive match day ticket sales;
- Relationship development, specifically within the community;
- Grow member numbers and sources of revenue.

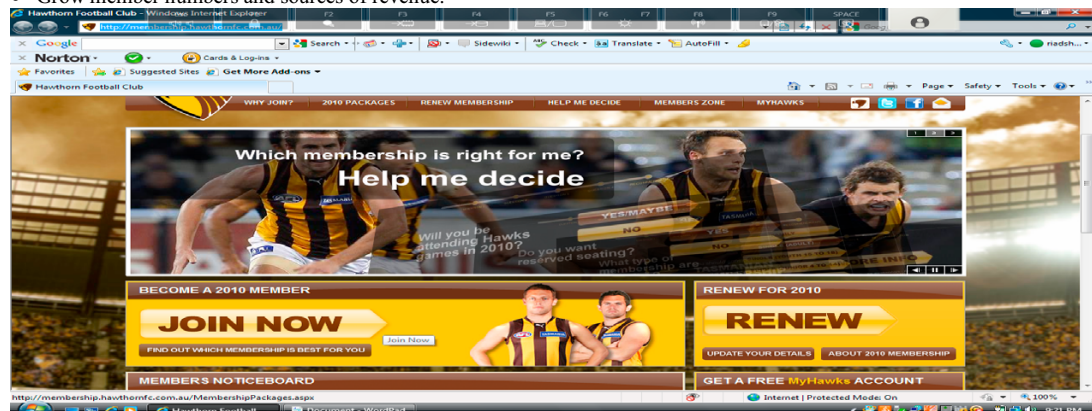


Figure-1: Help Me Decide [8] option of Hawthorn's Membership web-page.

The web-page of Figure-1 shows how Hawthorn's Membership and Fan Development Executive facilitates its value-network's integrated business data through the central e-CRM, in the aim of predicting market trend and formulating long-term market development strategies. Hawthorn helps their fans to decide the best suited membership package to buy, through the e-CRM centred interactive membership web-page (Figure-1). Figure-1 shows that Hawthorn further customised their 'Membership Packages' based on two major questions to the fans. The first one, will you be attending the Hawks (Hawthorn) games in 2010? The second one, do you want reserved seating? As a result, supporters can get flexibility in their preferences. The flowchart of following Figure-2 is derived from the analysis of the content of Hawthorn's Help Me Decide option of Figure-1.

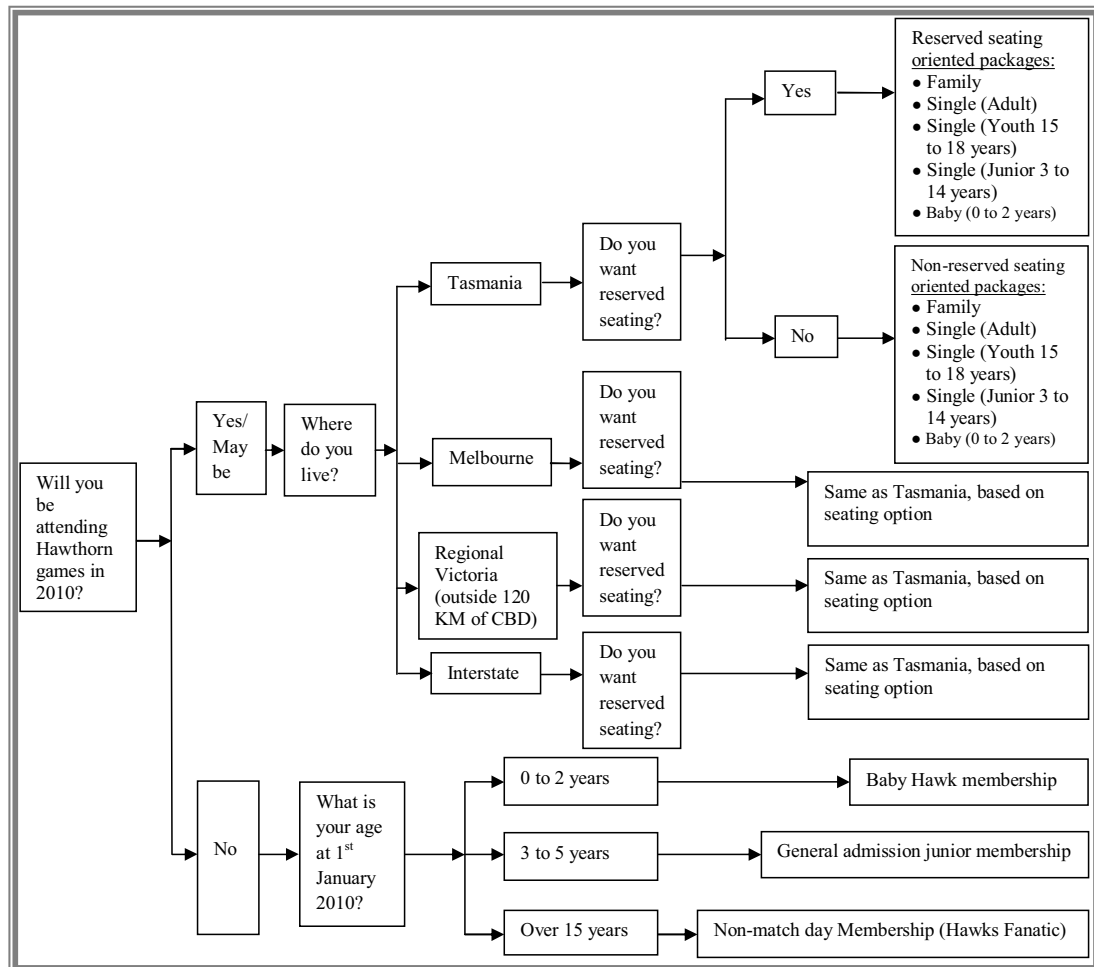


Figure-2: Hawthorn's Flowchart to Decide the Best Suited Membership Packages  
[Source: Derived from Help Me Decide 8]

Figure-2 shows that Hawthorn has targeted all of the age segments (from zero to older) of its supporters against the membership offerings. Moreover, Hawthorn sub-segments the whole Australian market of Australian Rules in different sub-segments (Tasmania, Melbourne, Victoria, interstate as different states and cities of Australia). Further segmenting a segmented market helps marketers to understand the needs, wants and demands very closely, as well as helps to offering products and services as solution of those needs, wants and demands [Kotler et al 9; Kurtz 10].

Again, the goals prior to introducing an integrated central e-CRM database shows that the historical data and its' trend, stored in Hawthorn's central e-CRM database through the membership's interactive web-page and other sources, helps Hawthorn Membership and Fan Development Executive to analyse and synthesis the data to realise the market trend (changing contemporary needs, wants and demands), and identify, establish, maintain and enhance VBB accelerated market offerings in association with the key stakeholder. Therefore, from the analysis, the central e-CRM, websites contents and other social (web 3.0) networking media is identified as the business fields of the Hawthorn's Membership and Fan Development Executive.

Following the key responsibilities, described earlier in the section-3, the key performance indicators of the Hawthorn's Membership and Fan Development Executive [7] are:

- Support the membership and development department to manage and report on e-CRM systems;
- Develop a qualified supporter database and prospect pool;
- Grow the customer database.

From this context, the Hawthorn Membership and Fan Development Executives' e-CRM, interactive websites and web 3.0 applications centred initiatives has appeared prolifically successful, as at the end of 2009, Hawthorn has achieved a record of 52,493 proud, passionate and paid-up members (New Membership Website 11) through their IT centred dominating membership strategies. Whereas, the CEO of Hawthorn, Stuart Fox [12 np] described that 'everyone criticised at the club when it set out in 2008 to sign 50,000 members by 2009. In association with various commercial partners and sponsors (the key stakeholders of Hawthorn value-network), Hawthorn has been offering various value-added products and services to its customers by understanding the market trend through the IT centred e-CRM, website promotions and web 3.0 applications, which helps Hawthorn to reach at today's financially strong platform, by transforming Hawthorn value-network into a VBB network [Stavros 2; Membership 13; MyHawks 14; Package Comparison 15; Why Join 16; FAQ 17; Hawk Headhunter 18; Member Loyalty Program 19; Hawks Member Benefits 20; Hawks Flight Centre 21; Tasmanian Corporate Hospitality 22; Family Club 23; Hawksnest 24; Hawks Online Auction 25; Hawks Kids 26; Hawks TV 27; Create Highlight 28; Sponsorship 29; Naming Rights Partner 30]. The value-network and VBB network are defined in the following sub-sections 3.1 and 3.2.

### 3.1. Value-network

Value network is a set of social, business and expertise resources formed by the key stakeholders to re-generate value within and or beyond the network. Value Network works together via relationships to create economic value. This value takes the form of knowledge. Value networks exhibit interdependence. They account for the overall worth of products and services. Companies have both internal and external value networks. External facing networks include customers or recipients, intermediaries, stakeholders, complementors, open innovation networks and suppliers. Internal value networks focus on key activities, processes and relationships that cut across internal boundaries, such as order fulfilment, innovation, lead processing, or customer support [Babylon 31].

Value is produced through exchange and the relationships between the roles (of the stakeholders). Value network operate in public agencies, civil society, in the enterprise, institutional settings, and all forms of organisation. Value networks advance innovation, wealth, social good and environmental well-being [Babylon 31, np].

### 3.2. Value-Breeding Bond Network (VBB)

The VBB network has been defined from the context of the definition of value-network, and Hawthorn's value proliferation success in its value-network.

VBB network could be a significant value proliferating network of RM, centred on a steady and continuously re-processable approach 'to identify, establish, maintain and enhance value' [Gronroos 32, p. 101] within and some time beyond the value-network or group of stakeholders, so that value can be generated repeatedly through the re-productiveness of existing value while each stakeholder plays some value added role, by way of stakeholders working interdependently towards mutually beneficial, multifarious goals. The VBB practice enhances long-term understanding, commitment, interdependence, respect and mutual benefits among the stakeholders, derived from an initial win-win outcome focused commercial bond. Since, the nature of the VBB is to generate further value within or some time beyond the value-network based on the existing value's potentials of re-productiveness of further value. One example of Hawthorn's VBB network has been demonstrated in the section-4.

## 4. Influence of E-CRM and RM practice on transforming Hawthorn's value-network into a VBB network: another example from Hawthorn's business development initiative

The value, which is originated through the 'Joint Power (as a RM tool [Gummeson 33; Kurtz 10])' of Hawthorn and its sponsor, has been breeding further value for the stakeholders of the Hawthorn value-network. For example, the analysis shows that the initial value among Hawthorn, Tasmania State Government as Hawthorn's current naming rights partner and people (potential customers) of Tasmania was initially rooted in 2001, while Hawthorn played their one of the home match first ever in Tasmania [Naming Rights Partner 30], where Hawthorn is a Victoria based Australian Rules Club. All of the stakeholders (Hawthorn, Tasmania State Government, people of Tasmania) of Hawthorn's Tasmania value-network have different multifarious goals here. The goal of Hawthorn could be penetrating into Tasmanian market intensively. Tasmania State Government's goal could be using the Hawthorn mania to enhance their community projects, boost up Tasmania's tourism industry, develop a strong Australian Rules practice in Tasmania aiming to strengthen the physical activities of Tasmanian young generation and so forth. On the other hand, the need of the Tasmanian customers could be enjoying Australian mainstream sport in their hometown. The initial value (playing in Tasmania for the first time), which was rooted in 2001 among the three stakeholders, has been breeding further value for them through the steady and continuously re-processable approach of identifying, establishing, maintaining and enhancing the initial value. As a result, further value has been generating repeatedly through the re-productiveness of that initial value.

Tasmania State Government became naming rights sponsor of the Hawthorn Football Club in 2006 after supporting Hawthorn several years through various associate sponsorships, prior to getting Hawthorn's exclusive naming rights ownership in 2006. At the end of the 2009, the membership of the Hawthorn is at a record high, with Tasmanians representing a remarkable fourteen per cent of the total Hawthorn membership, where Hawthorn has a unique membership offering for the Tasmanian market. In return, Hawthorn delivers significant benefits to the State's local communities [Help Me Decide 8; Naming Rights Partner 30]. Hawthorn has developed prominent community profile camps in Tasmania. The camps see Hawthorn players visit communities across the state, actively contributing to the efforts of local charities, community groups and football club fundraising activities. In July 2009 the Tasmanian Government and Hawthorn Football Club announced the Hawks in Schools program, aimed at encouraging school kids to have fun being active. The Hawks in Schools program delivers a free sports pack to all 226 primary schools around Tasmania. In addition to the sports packs and as part of the Tassie Hawks in Schools program, all grade four students in Tasmania receive a Tassie Hawks in Schools booklet, developed by Hawthorn's major partner MBF, in conjunction with the Tasmanian Department of Education. The booklet is fun and engaging, full of interesting sports and health-related information for kids. Tasmania has also grown its appeal as a visitor destination through the Hawthorn sponsorship. According to economic impact research [Naming Rights Partner 30], Tasmania is getting a significant return on its investment. During the 2008 season Australian \$15.136 million was injected into the Tasmanian economy from the travel and hospitality industry boomed by Hawthorn's promotion. A total of 299 full time equivalent employment positions were created in Tasmania as a result of the Hawthorn sponsorship, with 197 of these a direct result of increased tourist visitation. On the other hand, the Tasmanian customers have been fulfilling their need to enjoy Australian mainstream sports at their hometown as according to Hawthorn's Marketing Director not only did Tasmania seem to take a shining to Hawthorn as their team but also membership sales has been growing significantly in Tasmania, all of the Hawthorn's matches in Tasmania have been selling out, as well as Hawthorn has been receiving blanket media coverage in Tasmania since its very beginning to penetrate into Tasmanian market. Hawthorn Marketing Director further added that Tasmania market, starved of Australian Rules football but passionate viewers from distance, is now dominated by Hawthorn. Hawthorn's capturing of Tasmania market is a landmark for the Australian Rules given that other clubs had attempted to capture other parts of the country in the past with no real success [Stavros 2; Hawthorn FC 34; Naming Rights Partner 30].

Consequently, by ten years, the initial value that was rooted in 2001 has been continuously breeding further value through the initial value's potential re-productiveness of further value. As a result, Hawthorn has chosen Tasmania as their second home. The 2001's initial value enhanced the further value for Hawthorn as Tasmanian State Government's naming rights sponsorship in 2006, which helps Hawthorn to penetrate intensely into Tasmanian market, which directly reflects on Hawthorn's membership sale from Tasmania. Simultaneously, Tasmanian local community has been benefiting from the initial value by enjoying further value, generated by the initial value, as well as the initial value created additional value on Tasmanian economy too. The ten year's VBB practice among these three stakeholders enhances long-term understanding, commitment, interdependence, respect and mutual benefits among them through an initial commercial bond, which developed the platform for further value-proliferating opportunities for them from larger perspectives, as at the end of the 2009, the CEO of Hawthorn, Stuart Fox [12] can evaluate the further value-proposition with the Tasmanian government, which is estimated to be worth up to Australian \$20 million over another five years.

As a result, the 'VBB approach (as a RM tool [Gronroos 32; Gide & Shams 35])' has been contributing mutually beneficial value among the key stakeholders and has transformed Hawthorn's value-network (composed by Hawthorn, Tasmanian State Government and people of Tasmania) into a VBB network by identifying, establishing, maintaining and enhancing further value from the re-productiveness of the initial value.

Hawthorn's central e-CRM database helps Hawthorn to understand every current aspect of its businesses, as well as helps Hawthorn to forecast any further value proliferating opportunity to foster its growth. The research and development focused central e-CRM database is found at the heart of Hawthorn's all commercial and operational activities. The central e-CRM database plays a vital role in Hawthorn's day-to-day business activities to formulate long term research and development focused new market development strategies. Hawthorn can understand stakeholders' (customers, sponsors, commercial partners and so forth) changing service needs, contemporary demands against their continuous commitment on Hawthorn and so forth through the analysis of the outcome of their e-CRM database. Along with the day to day operational activities, it helps Hawthorn to thrive further prospects by utilising RM through understanding the market trend based on the historical data, stored in the e-CRM, to flourish further win-win outcomes focused business opportunities in terms of their membership, sponsors, commercial partners and other perspectives. The data stored in the database helps Hawthorn to analyse their stakeholder's current position, and future trend, which helps them to assess opportunities and corrective actions for their market offerings. As a result, in 2006 Hawthorn was able to get the Tasmanian government as 'Naming Rights Partner', where the opportunity evolved through the assistance of the data analysis, which was stored in the e-CRM database since of its implementation in 2003. Therefore, the evolution of the identified VBB network derived from the analysis of Hawthorn value-network is centred on the Hawthorn's e-CRM.

## 5. Conclusion

The initial literature review of this study shows that Hawthorn had a serious financial complexity. Hawthorn not only has conquered that complexity, but also has established a strong financial platform, as well as enduring that strong platform to a further stage of value proliferation by transforming its value-network into a VBB network. The Hawthorn's VBB network facilitates the opportunity of identifying, establishing, maintaining and enhancing further value from the re-productiveness of an initial value. For this, Hawthorn has utilised the central e-CRM, where the e-CRM supports Hawthorn effort of analysing its

historical market data to predict market trend. As a result, the e-CRM facilitates Hawthorn to strategise contemporary market offerings in association with its key stakeholders of the Hawthorn value-network, focusing on offering the products and services as a solution of the predicted market trend. Moreover, the analysis shows that by proffering such market offerings, not only Hawthorn has been achieving its business goals, but also its stakeholders (sponsors, commercial partners, and customers) have been delighting as a Hawthorn business partner. As a result, the Hawthorn's market offerings derived from the analysis of the historical market data, stored in the central e-CRM helps Hawthorn value network (Hawthorn and its stakeholders) to transform into a VBB network by prolifically developing further value from the re-productiveness of the initial value of Hawthorn's value-network. Therefore, Hawthorn's VBB network is evolved from the application of e-CRM (as a tool of RM [Kurtz 10; Buttle 36]), where the existing value has been continually breeding further value for its stakeholders and promoting value-network to the next stage of successful value proliferation from the re-productiveness of their mutually beneficial existing relationships value, which is established as a perfect learning of prolific using of e-CRM database for transforming a value-network into a VBB network from the context of value-proliferation.

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