

Sports Geek Nation AMA with Conrad Caplin

Conrad Caplin is the Co-Founder of Pronto CX based in Washington DC. He currently heads product and technical strategy department. Pronto CX transforms fan experience at sporting events, music festivals, and other mass participation events through smartphones, smart cards and wearables.

Conrad recently helped the Los Angeles Football Club roll out ticketing on Apple Watch and iPhone devices for a contactless ticketing services.

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Find out more about ProntoCX at <http://www.prontocx.com/>

Here's the full transcript:

Links to names will link you into Slack community, if you are not a member [please sign up here](#).

Q. [Sean Callanan](#): I'll kick things off [@Conrad Caplin \(prontocx\)](#) can you give us some insight how the project with LAFC started and how the project has gone so far especially feedback from fans in the stands (or at the turnstiles if you will).

A. [@Conrad Caplin \(prontocx\)](#): Thanks Sean. Very pleased to be able to share re Contactless Tickets at Banc of California Stadium.

A lot of credit goes to the Los Angeles Football Club (LAFC), a new pro soccer/football team in Major League Soccer this year.

They're hyper focused on delivering the best customer/fan experience possible and see technology as a key part of that. Especially with a mobile-first strategy, and that's where Pronto is a great fit.

It's not just about a mobile wallet, but a 'modern mobile wallet'!

SKIDATA was also key to getting things off the ground, because they have great hardware and were really motivated to support NFC via Apple Wallet stadium-wide.

The reaction from fans has been very positive... there's a genuine element of surprise and delight. We all know NFC/contactless works, but it's a game-changer when you get to use your iPhone or Apple Watch instead of traditional physical cards.

It's actually a lot of fun monitoring the turnstiles watching fans come in... when people hold their smartphone near the reader and they come through the gates, it's like 'wow, that was easy' and you can see fans are tickled.

But it's definitely not easy to get up and running. There's a lot of integration work required with ticketing, access control, Apple requirements, marketing and communications, and fan/customer education.

Can't underscore the need for focus on marcom and fan education enough. Changing default behavior isn't easy, especially with fans just now getting really comfortable QR codes in mobile ticketing.

Q. [Edward Ernst](#): @Conrad Caplin (prontocx) what're your long term plans for the "modern mobile wallet"? Seemingly, you're already tracking each fan's journey from the turnstile to their seat and then to different vendors - what would be some of the challenges for expanding this tracking throughout an entire stadium? Coming from the world of sponsorship, I'd be very interested if you see this as a way to map out the total fan experience from entry to exit (e.g. what activations do they walk past, how much time do they spend in certain areas away from their seats, etc.)

A. @Conrad Caplin (prontocx): Great questions Edward.

For 'modern mobile wallet' we strongly believe in going native... or making the most of the native Wallet and Google Pay apps on iPhones and Androids respectively.

These apps come pre-installed on every device. Users are familiar with them and comfortable managing their credit cards there. So why duplicate that blocking and tackling inside another merchant/venue app?

Instead we see the 'modern mobile wallet' implemented in-app with Apple Pay and Google Pay API. Leaving the rest of the in-app experience available for useful information to customers like their account or member status, spend activity, rewards earned, partner benefits, or auto-top-up configuration etc. And not bogged down with credit card management in another app. A few Payment Service Providers (PSPs) support this model nicely, and some do it better than others, so it's important to pick one that has a developer friendly and flexible SDK.

Circling back to one of your question re "**total fan experience from entry to exit** (e.g. what activations do they walk past, how much time do they spend in certain areas away from their seats, etc.)"

One challenge teams venues/have is who's in my stadium and what do they like?

Ticketmaster once told us that they only know user information for 1 out of 3.7 tickets sold. And of that, they generally just know about the ticket purchaser's history, but nothing about what that fan does once they get inside the stadium or even if they go at all.

We see NFC as best way of enable teams/venues, and even brands, to capture first party data as never before.

Virtuous circle → Learn. Segment. Target them with better / more personalized services. Monetize. Repeat. It's probably fair to say that Ticketmaster shares this view to some extent as evidenced with their new Presence ticketing platform and the PID -- what they refer to as the Personal Identification #. But the jury is still out on how/whether they will use PID beyond entry gates

For a seamless end user experience in any venue ecosystem it's tough... that hasn't gotten much any easier over all. Some things are definitely easier than before but there's new considerations like coordination around key pairs used for encryption/decryption and contents of NFC payload that need to be agreed on now.

We see great opportunity in using Contactless beyond core functions of payments and ticketing. Especially for fan engagement and sponsor/brand activation..

Q. [Matt Scully-SWIAM](#): Hey @Conrad Caplin (prontocx)

Thanks for taking some time to answer our questions. I'm looking forward to using this for upcoming games! Our business focuses specifically on the travelling sports fan. In terms of the data you collect, I was interested to understand if you can distinguish between travellers and season ticket holders and if so, whether their buying behaviours are noticeably different?

A. @Conrad Caplin (prontocx): Hey Matt, yes you can absolutely distinguish between between different types of fans.

You can do this deliberately by creating different pass types that are then made available only to and used specifically by only those segments, or you can use a general pass and then make that distinction further downstream by inferring from a fan's behavior.

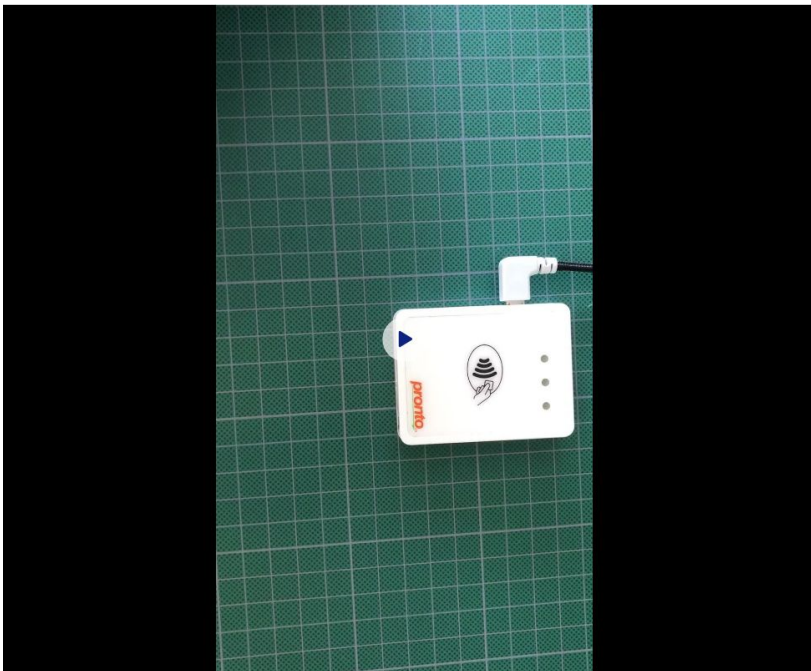
Ultimately because each Apple Wallet or Google Pay pass has a unique identifier and is associated with a unique user account, you are able to build very rich fan profiles over time... one tap at a time.

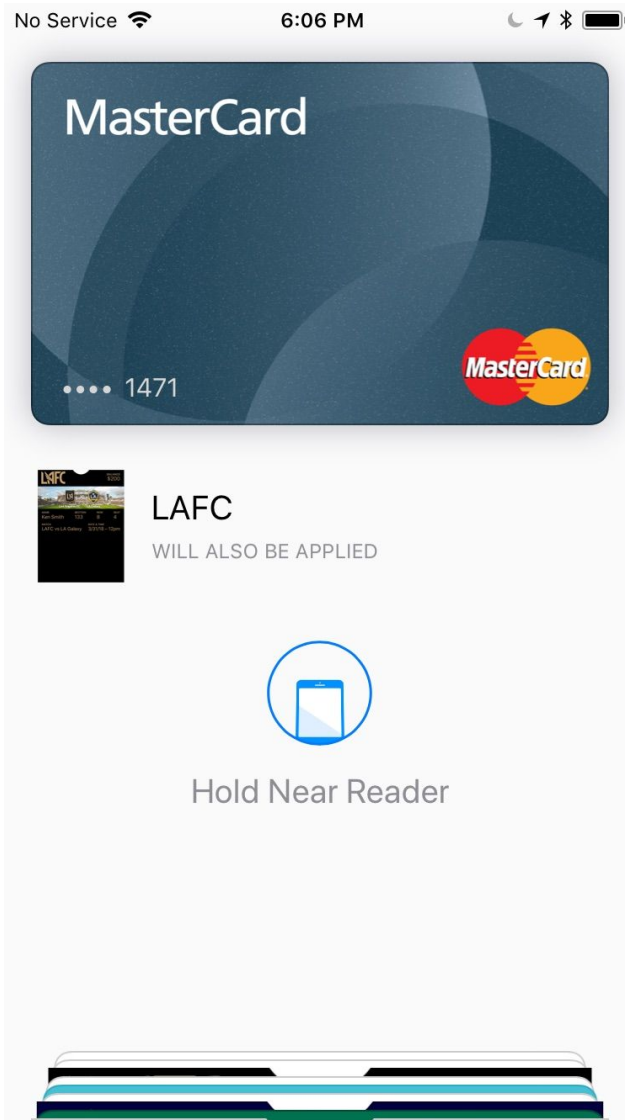
This progressive fan profiling is how you learn that I love hot dogs and you love nachos and our friend Mike drinks beer and always buys merchandise when he attends a game.

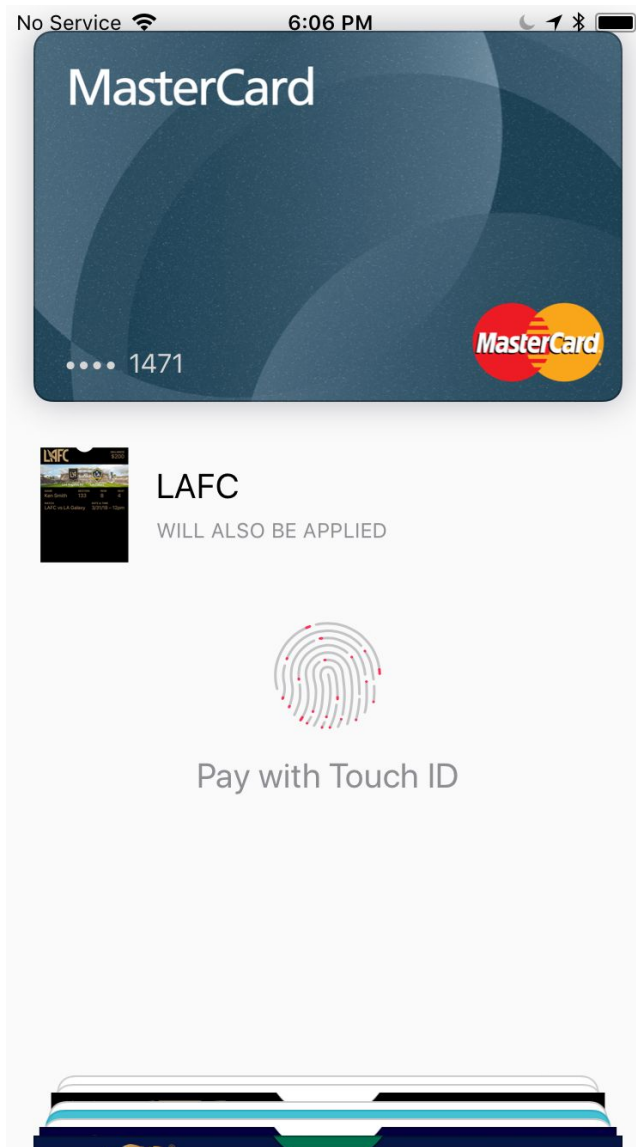
A key way one can capture this is via Apple or Google's automatic selection 1 Tap.

1 Tap is an example of Apple Pay's Automatic Selection at its finest. This terminal's dual mode configuration is referred to as 1 Tap, with both the Apple Pay credit card and let's say a team /venue's loyalty or member card being conveyed in a single tap. That means fans don't need to provide any personal/account information nor take a separate step to present a physical or digital member card (like a QR code from within an app).

All in a single tap... payment and member card conveyance:







One other thing I forgot to mention re season tickets is that the Apple Wallet or Google Pay contactless tickets are dynamic and can be updated real time. This also means that you can update tickets after each match with the ticket credentials, new images, and any other content necessary for the next one. This is huge, especially in sports like MLB where you have 81 home games. If architected properly, the end user should only need to add a pass to Wallet 1 time, and not for each game, and then they can just hold the top of their iPhone near a reader each game and just expect that it will work! And all of this doesn't interfere with existing mechanisms for tickets transfers or ticket sales.

Matt Scully-SWIAM: WOW, that is really cool @Conrad Caplin (prontocx)!! Thanks for providing this info, it will be fascinating to see how this evolves.

Q. [johnmccauley](#): @Conrad Caplin (prontocx) what a time to be alive and working in #sportsbiz & mobile ... what role do you think content plays in getting users to transact in a native mobile experience? #ama Cheers, @johnmccauley

A. @Conrad Caplin (prontocx): @johnmccauley Thanks! The bar has been raised re content. Consumers just expect more than they did a few years ago, or even last year. That's especially true in sports where fans are expecting the same high quality experience they are accustomed to in other verticals like retail. It's no longer good enough for teams or organizations to be a "classic" franchise or put a quality team on the field. Content needs to be spot on because there are so many competing forms of entertainment or alternatives for our discretionary time. And that applies to live events or even viewing at home. eSports anyone?

Taking a more nuanced view on content, the next level of "content" is how one interacts with content. It not only needs to be meaningful and look good, but is it easy to access and consume? That's where we see a lot of gains can be made by app developers or service providers: embrace what "native" has to offer — instead of promote a legacy stack that was heavily invested in years ago (or even recently) — put your own twist onto it, and I think the outcome will be delivering the content and experiences that today's consumers demand.

What do you think?

johnmccauley: To me it is crucial for any brand but especially a sports brand to attract fans to mobile with great content. It is the bait that should be used to ultimately get them to transact more. All roads lead to native mobile!

Q. [Rick](#): hi @Conrad Caplin (prontocx) you have some great ticketing technology there - visitors must be so intrigued by it all when seeing it work for the 1st time.

Just a question on how this contactless ticketing system works with the leagues and teams specifically. Most leagues and teams have their own apps and membership portals. During games, there is a lot of content flying around with fan engagement so crucial to the visitors experience. Is there pressure to make all this technology work well together? Does the tech need to work through the teams/leagues native apps? Is there pressure to do so?

More so, as the struggle to keep fans happy and engaged at events are so high, do you need to keep pushing the tech boundaries and have it all seamlessly work in a great user experience?

Cheers

Rick

A. @Conrad Caplin (prontocx): Re apps and membership portals: I won't say that integration with team / or venue apps and membership portals is easy, but it's probably easier than it's ever been. Our platform is modular and the we've architected it is be as plug-and-play as possible with existing apps or systems. We can serve as the system of record, but we're actually quite happy just surfacing member or account details managed by the team or a 3rd party membership or loyalty platform. That allows us to focus on and deliver best of breed NFC pass life cycle management services and getting NFC passes into customer mobile wallets. Teams get to keep their existing vendors, and we'll work the app provider for example to implement the "Add to Wallet" button that will use our web services to generate passes similar to how you add a boarding pass in an airlines app. Once the pass is in Wallet or Google Pay, the focus turns to enabling other vendors to read those passes and educating fans how and where they can use Apple Wallet or G Pay passes.

It's worth noting though that not all vendors are interested in integrating, so it's really key to have a team project manager making sure that everyone is swimming in the same direction and cooperating in good faith.

But some things you just cannot control... take for example two ticketing companies at opposite ends of the spectrum.... Ticketmaster and SeatGeek: they have very different philosophies on how they manage the ticket chain of custody and provide ticket data access to Partners serving a common client.

Fan engagement: we see greenfield here... nobody is really using NFC yet in a meaningful way for fan engagement. There's 2 main applications here... (1) presenting your pass in Wallet to check-in or engage in activities or (2) tap on NFC tags embedded or located throughout the venue.

Presenting the pass allows fans to engage with sponsors or brands that are activating. Imagine a personality quiz kiosk sponsored by J&J... tap in and answer 5 questions about your daily routine to find out which player's daily routine is most like yours and get a chance to win a prize. Easy and fun to participate for fans, de-anonymizes fans interacting with brands, and creates more sponsor value for the club.

Or enable pre-game activities like scavenger hunts where people need to simply tap with their phone to participate. Or hop into a photobooth and just tap once to trigger a photo session and then access their photos online.

On the tag reading side of things, opportunities are expanding now that Apple has enabled background NFC tag reading. Connected gear like Nike Connect is in play. Tap to trigger order ahead or in seat delivery are both super accessible now and require minimal

integration. And of course cool stuff like dynamic stadium tours or serving up dynamic content by tapping on the Bobby Moore statue is all possible now like never before.

Keeping fans happy and engaged: yeah absolutely, but i'd argue that while we're pushing boundaries to the next gen experience, what the end user experiences is ultimately more intuitive and less obtrusive than the status quo. Millennials have grown up with technology, and their parents are pretty savvy too. So if implemented thoughtfully, the end result is a Disney-like frictionless experience where you can simply hold your phone near a reader to do or trigger pretty much anything in a venue. And to your point about pressure from teams/league to make it all work well together, I think that's expected... if it's not, then they shouldn't be embarking on the project!

Q. Kevin R Naylor: @seancallanan my question to you this week would be... What percentage of teams/stadiums are having issues loading E-Tickets during entry into events? Is this an issue and if so what are teams doing to resolve. As E-Ticket adoption is only going to get more adoption and this will only escalate the problem.

A. @Conrad Caplin (prontocx): we don't have any hard data on e-ticket usability versus paper / print at home, but what I can tell you having stood at many many gates over the past few years, fans are very adept at using QR / barcodes on their mobile phone.

In part because of the experience they've had with e-tickets when traveling and boarding flights. Or for paying for their Starbucks. It's the new normal for most.

Where we see things go wrong is when fans present screenshots of a barcode ticket. Or arrive at the gate completely unprepared and need to search Gmail / their inbox to find their ticket.

What we're excited about re Contactless Tickets in Apple Wallet or Google Pay is that those 2 main issues are no more. QR codes, bye bye. And 'finding' your ticket is old news.... the reader does it automatically.

While every generation has different comfort levels with technology, we've seen tremendous adoption and appreciation for e-tickets. It's unequivocally where we're headed in today and tomorrow's smartphone world.

What is Sports Geek Nation?

Been forwarded this from a colleague? That's great we love seeing our members get credit for sharing their knowledge. Sports Geek Nation is a curated sports business community in Slack and Facebook which will help you learn from the very best in the world. Sports Geek Nation was founded by Sean Callanan in 2015 (as #SportsBiz Slack), it connects sports executives who work in digital, data and technology.

Sports Geek Nation has members from (in alphabetical order) Australia, Canada, Denmark, India, Lithuania, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States working in sports such as basketball, football, ice hockey, baseball, AFL, horse racing, golf, rugby league, netball and more.

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