



Crane Authentication™

Case Study
Sports & Apparel

The Football Association

Safeguarding licensing and enhancing brand appeal for the world's original football association

Dating from 1863, The Football Association (FA) is the oldest football association in the world. Crane Authentication is the exclusive supplier of brand authentication labels to The FA for licensed and directly supplied merchandise. A range of other components, including swing tags, badges, and bespoke items are also available to authorized partners to protect official licensed products and ensure brand consistency.

Challenge

Association football is unarguably the world's most popular sport. The beautiful game has come a long way since its origins, but the fundamentals remain intact. Fans continue to debate with vigor the offside rule, which was one of the first developments of the newly formed Football Association (FA) back in 1863. It may have evolved since and been joined by new innovations, but the basic rules set by The FA remain the bedrock of a game that draws an estimated 250 million players worldwide.

The FA continues to serve as the custodian of the game in England. It is responsible for the national teams, for growing grass roots involvement in football, and organizing competitions including the historic Emirates FA Cup. More recently, The FA has been at the forefront of building the women's game into a growing force, with The Lionesses claiming the UEFA Women's Euro 2022 title.

As a major broadcast and sponsorship partner, the operator of Wembley Stadium, and the licensor of official apparel and merchandise for the England

teams, the FA oversees considerable commercial operations. In 2021 this generated income of more than £440 million but, more importantly, funded an investment of £122 million in coaching and participation, as well as other aspects of the game.

The iconic FA three lions emblem is worn on the shirts of England national teams and those of FA referees up and down the country. But it also appears on a range of official licensed apparel and merchandise, connecting passionate fans with their heroes, past and present. Protecting this identity from unauthorized use helps safeguard an important source of funding for the game, as well as ensuring an authentic product experience for followers of the national teams.

As with any iconic identity, the three lions are at risk of counterfeit, which risks undermining the brand, the rights of licensees, and the viability of the licensing program itself. As such, it requires an approach to authentication that can be applied across different categories of merchandise and across partners.

Solution

The FA turned to Crane Authentication, as a leading provider of sports licensing and brand authentication solutions, to provide a range of effective product merchandising and authentication measures:



Crane Authentication Protect: a numbered product security label that incorporates optical technologies to secure against counterfeit, as well as enabling other outcomes such as product traceability.



Crane Authentication Enhance: a range of distinctive silicone badges, hang tags, and product presentation elements to provide a consistent brand look and feel and to drive consumer recognition.

With a long heritage in licensing and merchandising and with expertise in optical security and design, Crane Authentication combines technology and creativity. Its portfolio of visual security features offers customers a range of options to suit their brand characteristics, as well as functional elements. For the FA, it meant a secure micro lithographic label, featuring the FA emblem, that also incorporates serialization data. It also included a range of merchandising and packaging elements for licensed and official products.

The micro lithographic (or hologram) element features a full color FA crest, with the "For All" logo, overlaid over a football pitch background with white line art pitch markings. A 2-channel switch effect converts the background to text, indicating a genuine product upon

movement. When viewed at an acute angle, a 2D-3D repeat of the FA logo is visible. Micro text adds security, including a kinetic side panel with contrasting text. Finally, hidden "FA" text can be revealed using a hand-held laser reader.

The labels also include serialization codes for product traceability. For official FA apparel and merchandise, Crane Authentication created heat applied silicone badges, branded swing tickets, card over-riders, header cards, and garment holders. For licensees and merchandise manufacturers that require something a bit different for their official products, Crane Authentication is also able to undertake bespoke component developments.

Results

National sports associations, such as The Football Association, face competing demands from fans, licensees, and other stakeholders. Effective, authentic merchandising programs connect fans to their national team but also generate funds to invest in the foundations of the game. Adding robust brand protection to these programs protects fans and funding from unauthorized products and poor-quality counterfeits, while the use of impactful merchandising builds brand consistency. By bringing together authentication and enhancement, The Football Association helps safeguard the three lions' legacy.

"It's been a pleasure to work with Crane Authentication on protecting The FA brand and revenues that come from our licensing and retail business, which in turn allows us to invest more back into the game. Our licensees are extremely important to us, so ensuring they can order holograms and packaging from Crane Authentication easily supports them in pushing FA branded product into the marketplace for fans to purchase.

We look forward to continuing to work with Crane Authentication going forward into our new deal and to continue to enhance the security offering."

Michael Lees, Licensing Partnerships Manager at The Football Association

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