



DIAGNOSTIC GUIDE · FAN INSIGHT

Eight Common Fan Problems.

The eight problems clubs most often surface through fan research, what they sound like in the data, and the responses the evidence base supports. With the churn evidence every club should know.

**The metric is the symptom.
The broken relationship is the cause.**

Eight Common Fan Problems.

This guide pairs the problems clubs most often discover through fan research with the responses the evidence base supports. Each problem is also a relationship problem, and each card carries a line on how the same problem sounds at community scale.

Use the checklist page as a conversation device: put it in front of leadership or the committee and ask which ones sound like this club. Most recognise four or five. The guide closes with the strongest evidence in the series: churn is predictable, and tenure compounds.

The metric is the symptom. The broken relationship is the cause.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Anyone diagnosing a fan base: program owners, marketing leads, membership managers, agencies walking a client through their gaps, committees taking an honest look.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

One of seven standalone guides drawn from The Fan Insight Playbook (2026 edition), Tiparra's operating manual for the fan relationship. The companion guides are listed at the back. Where this guide cites a statistic, the full citation is in its sources page and in the playbook's Appendix C.

Which of these do you recognise?

This guide pairs the problems clubs most often discover through fan research with the responses the evidence base supports. Each problem is also a relationship problem. The metric is the symptom; the broken relationship is the cause.

EIGHT COMMON FAN PROBLEMS · WHICH OF THESE DO YOU RECOGNISE

01 Beyond a name and an email

RELATIONSHIP DAMAGE

You can't have a relationship with a record.

02 Averages hide unhappy fans

RELATIONSHIP DAMAGE

Bimodal scores conceal the people you'll lose.

03 Fans feel priced out

RELATIONSHIP DAMAGE

Price is a signal about who the club is for.

04 Comms feel like spam

RELATIONSHIP DAMAGE

Volume without relevance is the opposite of being known.

05 No insight on digital-only fans

RELATIONSHIP DAMAGE

The most enthusiastic, the least known.

06 A great survey, never used

RELATIONSHIP DAMAGE

Worse than not asking at all.

07 Can't predict who'll lapse

RELATIONSHIP DAMAGE

Drift you find out about at renewal time.

08 Leadership doesn't trust the data

RELATIONSHIP DAMAGE

Fan voice never reaches the decision room.

The metric is the symptom. The broken relationship is the cause.

Treat it as a starting menu. Not every fix applies to every club, but the diagnostic questions are universal. The detail of each problem follows, with a line under each on how the same problem sounds at community scale.

The unknown fan, the unhappy fan.

PROBLEM 01

"We don't know who our fans are beyond a name and an email."

Relationship damage. You can't have a relationship with a record. Generic communications are the inevitable output of generic knowledge, and they're how fans learn the club doesn't really see them.

At a community club: the rego list is the database, and nobody has asked the members anything since the uniform vote.

What it sounds like in research: Generic communications, broad satisfaction scores, low engagement on personalised offers, no behavioural variation in campaign response.

Fix:

- Build a behavioural and attitudinal segmentation from the annual.
- Map every segment to the operational systems: ticketing, CRM, app, retail.
- Tag every fan into a primary segment and update annually.

PROBLEM 02

"Our matchday scores are good overall but a quiet group of fans are unhappy."

Relationship damage. Averages hide the people you're losing. A bimodal distribution means one cohort is having a different relationship with the club than the rest, and that cohort is the most likely to leave.

At a community club: the vocal happy families at presentation night, and the quiet ones who don't re-register.

What it sounds like in research: A bimodal satisfaction distribution. High average, but a long tail of detractors, usually concentrated in a specific stand, fan type, or fixture situation.

Fix:

- Drill the always-on data by stand, start time, fixture type. The pattern is almost always there.
- Run a targeted qualitative session with the unhappy segment.
- Start with the basics. Deloitte's stadium experience research (15,000+ US fans across seven leagues) finds food-and-drink value for money among the lowest satisfaction scores in the whole data set, even where the headline experience scores well. Fix the operational root cause; the score follows.

The priced-out fan, the spammed fan.

PROBLEM 03

"Fans say they feel priced out."

Relationship damage. Price tells fans who the club is for. Each time a fan feels priced out, they hear that the relationship is conditional.

At a community club: fees, boots, petrol. The cost conversation is happening in the car park either way.

What it sounds like in research: Cost is a measured barrier in this market. The AFL Fans Association's 2024 survey (4,155 fans) found about one in five planning to attend fewer games because of cost of living; its 2025 wave repeated the finding, with 7% downgrading memberships and 4% cancelling. ING/YouGov (2025, 1,002 fans) put the all-in cost of attending a live game at \$408 a person. And the cost starts before the gate: the Australian Sports Commission's 2026 Cost of Sport study put the average entry-level cost of playing at \$1,161 for a child and \$1,200 for an adult.

Fix:

- Don't try to argue the price down. Accept the perception.
- Audit the value side of the equation. The value side moves the number: when the Atlanta Falcons halved food prices, overall in-stadium spend rose 16% (Deloitte).
- Test bundles in the next pulse: family bundles, kids-go-free fixtures, junior memberships, flexi and three-game memberships, payment plans.
- Be transparent about cost drivers. Fans tolerate price rises they understand far better than ones they don't.

PROBLEM 04

"Our communications feel like spam to fans."

Relationship damage. Volume without relevance is the opposite of being known. Every irrelevant email is a small piece of evidence that the club isn't paying attention.

At a community club: every message to every member, because the group chat is the only channel.

What it sounds like in research: Low open rates, "don't get relevant communication" in open verbatims, opt-out spikes, push-notification disable rates climbing.

Fix:

- Cut volume hard before doing anything else. Less is almost always better.
- Use the segmentation to drive content variation. A digital-only fan interstate does not need ticket reminders.
- Move transactional comms to channels fans actually check: app push for game-day-critical info, email for considered content.
- Run a "comms audit" pulse asking fans which communications they actually want.

The digital-only fan, the wasted survey.

PROBLEM 05

"We have no insight at all on our digital-only fans."

Relationship damage. The digital-only fan is often the most enthusiastic and the least known. Treating them as a residual category, a follower count rather than a person, leaves the deepest fan relationship in the database untended.

At a community club: the past players and distant supporters who'd back the club tomorrow if anyone asked.

What it sounds like in research: Database skewed to ticket-buyers, social engagement strong but uncorrelated with revenue, no clear journey for non-attending fans.

Fix:

- Use the always-on layer to recruit digital-only fans into a research panel, through social, the website, and the app.
- Run a segment-specific module in the annual on motivations, content preferences, and willingness to pay.
- Treat them as a distinct fan type. Their value is different in shape: content, merchandise, sponsor receptivity, amplification.
- Remember the under-16 slice of this audience can no longer hold accounts on the designated platforms at all. For junior fans, the club's own channels are the only direct line.

PROBLEM 06

"We did a great survey two years ago and never used it."

Relationship damage. Asking fans to give you their views and then ignoring them is worse than not asking at all. It signals that their voice doesn't matter, and that's the most expensive signal you can send to a fan base.

At a community club: the survey a committee member ran two AGMs ago. Nobody can find the spreadsheet.

What it sounds like internally: The deck is on a shared drive somewhere. Nobody owns the actions. The next survey is being designed without reference to the last one.

Fix:

- Assign one named owner of the insight program. They don't have to do the research, but they own follow-through.
- Build a simple action tracker: every insight tagged with an action, an owner, and a deadline. Review monthly.
- Adopt a "You Said, We Did" cadence. Quarterly comms to fans showing what's changed because of what they told you.

The lapsing member, the doubtful boardroom.

PROBLEM 07

"We don't know which members are about to lapse."

Relationship damage. The lapsing member is a relationship the club has lost without realising. By the time the renewal goes unanswered, the drift has been happening for two or three seasons.

At a community club: you find out at rego time, when the family just doesn't come back.

What it sounds like in research: Renewal rates are flat or declining and you can't predict who'll go. Reactive churn. You find out when they don't renew.

Fix:

- Build a churn model from data you already have: attendance frequency, time-since-last-purchase, app activity, service contacts, NPS. The Australian evidence says this works; the next page carries it.
- Watch the measured predictors: tenure, distance from the ground, and late-season attendance. New members who attend little are around five times more likely to lapse than long-tenured frequent attenders (McDonald, 2010).
- Run a dedicated at-risk member qualitative wave 8 to 10 weeks before renewal opens. Talk to 20 to 30 fans the model flags.
- Build a tiered intervention: proactive outreach for highest-risk, segmented offers for medium, business-as-usual for low. Track the win-back rate as a program KPI.

PROBLEM 08

"Leadership doesn't trust the data."

Relationship damage. When leadership doesn't trust the data, fan voice doesn't make it into the room where decisions are made. The relationship is run on executive instinct, and instinct is wrong far more often than it admits.

At a community club: "the members will hate it" settles arguments no one has actually tested.

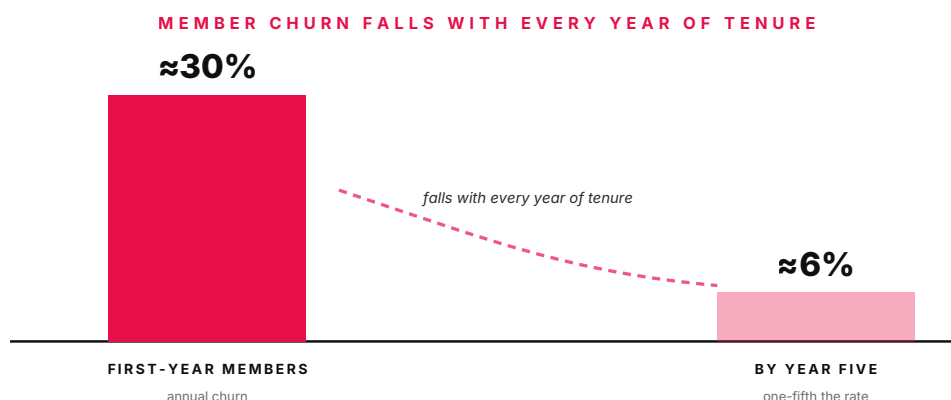
What it sounds like internally: Insights get challenged in meetings, sample sizes get questioned, single anecdotes override patterns.

Fix:

- Be transparent about methodology in every readout: sample, weighting, who you spoke to, what you didn't ask.
- Pair every quant insight with a fan quote. Numbers convince analysts; quotes convince boards.
- Bring leadership into the qualitative once a year. Direct exposure changes how the numbers get read afterwards.
- Set a small number of headline metrics and report them every month, in the same format. Consistency builds trust.

Churn is predictable. Tenure compounds.

Problem 07 is the one place where the Australian evidence base is deep enough to lean on hard, so lean on it.



McDonald (2010): about 4,570 members across two AFL clubs. New, low-attending members churn at over five times the rate of long-tenured frequent attendees.

AUC 0.901

CHURN IS PREDICTABLE

118,469 season-membership renewal decisions at one Australian club across six seasons, modelled with machine learning. Yeomans et al. (2026), *Sport Management Review*. Full citation in Appendix C.

The same study names the strongest predictors, and none of them needs a data scientist to collect:

PREDICTOR 1

Tenure

PREDICTOR 2

Driving distance from the ground

PREDICTOR 3

Late-season attendance

A club that tracks who is new, who lives far away, and who stopped coming in August already has the bones of a churn model. The sophistication can come later. The discipline of looking is what changes the renewal number, because it converts churn from a result you discover into a risk you manage.

SOURCES CITED

Sources cited.

DELOITTE (2024 PUBLICATION)

"The Stadium Experience: Keeping sports fans engaged—and loyal", Deloitte. More than 15,000 US sports fans across seven leagues (MLB, MLS, NASCAR, NBA, NFL, NHL, WNBA); the survey series began in 2018. Findings cited: food-and-drink value ranks among the lowest satisfaction scores in the data set; the Atlanta Falcons' 50% concession price cut was followed by a 16% rise in overall in-stadium fan spend.

AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION

2.9 million Australians volunteer in sport each year (AusPlay 2023; AusPlay surveys about 40,000 Australians annually). Cost of Sport study, conducted by Federation University for the ASC, released 31 August 2026: average entry-level cost (registration or membership, uniform, equipment) of \$1,161 for children and \$1,200 for adults.

AFL FANS ASSOCIATION (2024, 2025)

National fan surveys run by the independent AFL Fans Association. 2024 wave: 4,155 fans; about one in five planning to attend fewer games due to cost of living. 2025 wave: overall fan satisfaction 2.7 out of 5, its lowest recorded; one in five planning fewer games; 7% downgraded memberships; 4% cancelled. The 2025 wave's sample size was not disclosed at time of writing; treat its figures as the association reports them.

ING / YUGOV (2025)

Survey of 1,002 Australian sports fans aged 18+, fielded 6 to 10 March 2025 by YouGov, weighted to ABS population data. Findings cited: attending a live game costs \$408 per person on average, all-in; Australian fans spend more than \$19 billion a year on their fandom.

Sources cited.

MCDONALD (2010)

McDonald, H., "The Factors Influencing Churn Rates Among Season Ticket Holders: An Empirical Analysis", *Journal of Sport Management*, 24(6), 676 to 701. About 4,570 season-ticket holders across two AFL clubs. Findings cited: churn rates often exceed 20%; new, low-attending members over five times more likely to churn than long-term frequent attendees; churn falls with each year of tenure, stabilising near 6% from year five against first-year rates near 30%.

YEOMANS, PURSER, KARG, NGUYEN AND SHORTER (2026)

"Machine learning and churn: predicting season ticket holder behaviour", *Sport Management Review*, 29(4), 707 to 733. 118,469 subscriber renewal decisions at one Australian professional club across six seasons. Best model AUC-ROC 0.901; strongest predictors tenure, driving distance, and late-season attendance.

AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA MINIMUM AGE (2025 TO 2026)

Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, with obligations in force from 10 December 2025 under the Online Safety Act 2021 and the Online Safety (Age-Restricted Social Media Platforms) Rules 2025. Ten platforms designated as of August 2026: Facebook, Instagram, Threads, TikTok, Snapchat, X, YouTube, Reddit, Kick, Twitch. Maximum civil penalty \$49.5m. Deactivation figure (4.7 million+ accounts in the ban's first days) from the eSafety Commissioner's March 2026 compliance update. "More than 5 million under-16s accounts removed, deactivated or restricted" and the proposal to raise the penalty "from \$49.5 million to \$99 million": Prime Minister's release, 28 June 2026. Online Safety Amendment (Strengthening Enforcement for the Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2026: House agreed to the Senate message on 10 September 2026; the penalty as enacted is not cited here. Account-holding fall from 52.4% to 42.1%: eSafety evaluation, July 2026. New Zealand: Online Safety (Minimum Age and Child Safety Risk Assessment) Bill, introduced 24 August 2026; no first reading before Parliament rose on 24 September 2026.



ABOUT THIS SERIES

Diagnosed. Now fix the **relationship.**

This guide named the problems and the evidence-backed responses. Fixing them sticks only when the program underneath runs on a discipline: one owner, one tracker, one visible loop back to fans.

WHAT TO READ NEXT

Read *Operating a Fan Insight Program* next. It carries the ownership model, the action tracker, and the close-the-loop discipline that separates programs that produce reports from programs that produce relationships.

COMPANION RESOURCES

00	The Fan Insight Playbook — the full operating manual	OPERATING PLAYBOOK
01	The Case for Knowing Your Fan	STRATEGY BRIEFING
02	The Listening Architecture	FRAMEWORK GUIDE
03	Designing Each Listening Layer	DESIGN GUIDE
05	Operating a Fan Insight Program	OPERATIONS GUIDE
06	Fan Insight Templates	TEMPLATE PACK
07	Selling a Fan Insight Program	PITCH GUIDE

START THE CONVERSATION

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