

CISCO TRANSFORMS BULLRING BIRMINGHAM INTO AN INTELLIGENT, CONNECTED SHOPPING CENTRE

When one of the UK’s most prestigious shopping centres – Bullring Birmingham – integrated a Cisco voice, video, data and wireless IP network around the centre, it gave shoppers access to real-time information, leading edge IP technology to all retailers and provided management with a highly sophisticated facilities management system.



Cisco mirrors vision for a world class shopping destination

Bullring Birmingham is the largest retail-led city centre regeneration scheme in Europe. Serving a population of 4.3 million with a potential spending power of £4.1 billion per annum, Bullring provides 110,000m2 of prime retail space comprising over 150 shops, two department stores – one of which is the largest Selfridges store outside London – and 18 cafes and restaurants.

Bullring’s developer – The Birmingham Alliance – is a partnership between three of the UK’s largest property development and investment companies: Hammerson plc, Land Securities Group plc and Henderson Global Investors Ltd. The Birmingham Alliance wanted to develop a cutting edge multimedia communication system that offered retail tenants and centre management the very best technology befitting the vision for Bullring as a world class shopping destination.

The Birmingham Alliance wanted to create not just the UK’s most exciting retail space, in terms of architectural innovation, open squares, performance spaces and boulevards, but also the most technologically advanced.

“We wanted a new benchmark in service levels we provide to Bullring’s retailers. A key element in this new partnership approach was to actively support their ability to increase efficiency and profitability. One of the main tools for doing so was the level of technology we made available to them,” says Andrew Thomson, a member of The Birmingham Alliance technology steering group.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CUSTOMER NAME	BUSINESS CHALLENGE	NETWORK SOLUTION	BUSINESS VALUE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bullring Birmingham shopping centre (Developer - The Birmingham Alliance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop leading edge technology to improve information provision for shoppers and retailers Provide a future proof technology infrastructure able to meet current and changing business needs Reduce ongoing operational costs over the lifecycle of the centre Create additional revenue streams for the centre operators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cisco’s IP core network infrastructure supporting voice, video and data communications throughout Bullring Birmingham Cisco wireless technology delivers centre-wide mobile communications to shoppers and retailers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost-effective IP networking facilities available to retailers, large and small Retailers able to access and order facilities management services via in-shop terminals Centre visitors given real-time access to a wealth of information from promotions and store guides to local events and transport Wireless capability makes Bullring one of the largest WiFi sites in Europe
<p>INDUSTRY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retail and facilities management 			
<p>COMPANY SIZE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise 			

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Cisco technology is proven, secure and very robust

Working with Cisco Systems and strategic infrastructure supplier Redstone, The Birmingham Alliance developed and installed a Cisco Unified Communications solution throughout Bullring's entire complex which also supports Cisco wireless technology. Able to deliver 100Mbps to 165 retailers, the Cisco-based IP network also supports the 30-strong Bullring management team with IP telephony and a range of other network services, and offers more than 28 public points of presence.

The system was designed, implemented and managed by Redstone. The result has been the creation of an e-enabled intelligent, connected shopping centre offering both wired and wireless connectivity for voice, video and data, with additional scope for value-added services and facilities. Cisco's intelligent network enables a continuously expanding suite of innovative retailer amenities, visitor services, and staff applications by providing a higher level of connectivity between all the stakeholders.

"Bullring is a very high profile project, and we required a networking system of similarly high calibre which could reflect the values of the project as a whole," says Ben Darji, Bullring's Network Manager. "We chose Cisco because they are industry leaders in IP networking. Cisco's technology is already proven: it's very robust and it's secure."

With a thin-client web terminal installed in every retail unit, the converged network offers retail tenants broadband intranet connection as standard, as well as immediate access to a wide range of additional IP facilities and services. Although retailers have used this type of technology before, Bullring is one of the only shopping centres to treat all 165 retail units as a single entity, to create a comprehensive IP network covering an entire retail centre. The network is a plug-and-play solution which is already in place. All the retailers need to do is decide which services they want. They do not have to install cables or manage the network.

Having a Bullring-wide IP network means that tenants can be offered IP-enabled services on an ad hoc, price per port basis. This makes it viable for every Bullring tenant to access the very latest IP-enabled services, even those with limited budgets and resources.

To overcome limited bandwidth availability, and to provide additional feature-rich services, a comprehensive Cisco wireless network has been installed to cover the entire Bullring complex, thereby creating a massive wireless environment. A wide variety of optional IP-enabled communications services are being developed for tenants.

"With 30 access nodes available with Cisco mobile communications technology, Bullring is probably the biggest public access WiFi (Wireless Fidelity) network in Europe," says Darji.

Shopping, selling and FM improves with Cisco IP network

In the six months since opening in September 2003, over 21 million shoppers visited Bullring. With such an unprecedented level of footfall, Bullring's retailers have benefited from the sophisticated technology platform put in place in the city's new shopping destination. The Cisco Unified Communications system provides immediate plug and play access to advanced IP-enabled services such as IP telephony, high speed wired and wireless Internet and intranet access, innovative multimedia promotional facilities all linked to Bullring's centre management. Shoppers can also interact with Bullring's technology via 29 in-mall touch-screen kiosks to obtain information about shops, latest offers, job opportunities and public transport updates.

"The Cisco IP network offers Bullring tenants and customers a level of connectivity and interactivity they have never had before in a retail environment. It supports tenants in realising increased efficiency and profitability. And it helps ensure the most exciting retail experience for customers. We see it as a role model for other retail centres."

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Bullring's Network Manager

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Many of Bullring's retailers are making use of the IP network particularly with regard to building management services. Through the IP terminal in each unit, tenants have automatic access to the centrally-controlled Bullring intranet portal.

"The portal gives us a paperless solution accessible 24 hours a day," says Darji. "Retailers can order maintenance and other services through the portal. All the health and safety information, building regulations and building documentation is available. And it will also provide up-to-date news, event details and policy changes, as well as information on sales factors such as weather and traffic."

Advertising and sales promotion can also be done electronically. The IP network is being used to reach a captive audience of thousands of shoppers every day, by posting multimedia advertising, sales promotions, job vacancies and other information on the numerous interactive touch-screens and passive plasma screens sited in the malls. For example, by tracking shopping habits, retailers can respond rapidly to tailor promotions, strategies and stock to suit customer demand.

There are 31 large plasma screens linked the Cisco network which are helping retailers increase sales and provide information to shoppers. The screens are located at prime sites around Bullring and where retailers have used them for advertising, their sales have increased significantly. Bullring offers a promotional service to retailers which manages display content and timing and uses the network to show specific advertisements on the appropriate screens.

"A retailer can simply use their terminal to log onto the Bullring intranet, click on 'Jobs' to access a form, fill this in and submit it to the Bullring management team, over the intranet. Once it has been checked against our advertising and promotional standards, it can then be instantaneously published on the public-area screens," says Darji.

The 29 touch screens also provide shoppers with on-screen information on the Bullring as well as the opportunity to view train departure/arrival times and regional road traffic information.

As part of the centre specific information systems offered to retailers, the Bullring laboratory encourages retailers to explore the use of technology in the running of their day to day business.

Future-proofing is a major benefit of the Cisco IP network. "Bullring is a large complex centre on multiple levels. So no-one can predict precisely how it will evolve," says Thomson. "Over time, people will inevitably generate exciting ideas for new IP-based services. And because the Cisco technology is standards-based, we can be sure it will support whatever future services our retailers want."

The Birmingham Alliance, Redstone and Cisco have worked closely together to create a highly innovative leading-edge solution for Bullring. "The Cisco IP network offers Bullring tenants and customers a level of connectivity and interactivity they have never had before in a retail environment. It supports tenants in realising increased efficiency and profitability. And it helps ensure the most exciting retail experience for customers. We see it as a role model for other retail centres," says Darji.



The mobile communication capability of Cisco IP technology makes Bullring one of the biggest public access WiFi (Wireless Fidelity) network in Europe.



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