

Historical Race Course Turns To a Wireless Future

Cisco Unified Wireless Network improves business operations at the Australian Jockey Club and provides wireless access for guests.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUSTRALIAN JOCKEY CLUB

- Outdoor Sporting Venue
- Racing Club for Thoroughbred Horse Racing
- Convention Venue

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Inefficient logistical operations
- Add revenue generating wireless access for guests
- Need for flexible, rapid reconfiguration of network settings

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Wireless Local Area Network with management and monitoring from a central location

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Logistical efficiency in stock management
- Improved staff productivity and responsiveness
- Secure, wireless guest access

Business Challenge

Founded in 1842, the Australian Jockey Club (AJC) is one of the country's most senior – and prestigious – racing clubs. Its two racecourses, Royal Randwick and Warwick Farm, serve also as convention centres. Services provided at these convention centres include planning, organising, and catering events, ranging from cocktail parties and weddings to business conferences.

In 2006, AJC invested in the development of a masterplan, with an aim to dramatically improve the use of current facilities and enhance the spectator experience. Brad Shorrock, information technology (IT) operations manager at AJC says, "As rich and historical as the club's culture is, we also realised that we would have to continuously re-invent our services and improve operations to keep up with contemporary needs. We are always looking for ways to make our operations more technologically savvy."

The club subsequently embarked on an ongoing project to add more sophisticated technology applications - such as online payments, applications to streamline the processing of results and photo finishes, and transaction systems to handle nomination and acceptance fees for feature races.

Even with the deployment of new applications, there remained a need for AJC to better integrate operations on-the-ground, so as to optimise the use of current facilities while enhancing the customer experience. Specifically, Shorrock's team highlighted that the areas they wanted to improve were the delivery of information throughout the facility, add revenue generating wireless access for guests, and be able to flexibly configure its settings when needed.

Events like horse races, conferences, and dinner parties were labour-intensive affairs, with many staff having to serve as runners to keep tabs on supplies. The inefficient delivery of information meant that,



when it came to restocking beverages for events like horse races and conferences, runners would have to be deployed to check on restocking needs, before returning to the office to communicate these quantities. Information delays would also be exacerbated by the setup of mobile drinks and food stalls around the racecourse, which added to the list of locations that needed to be checked.

With more corporate delegates needing to use the Internet at functions and conferences held at its convention centres, AJC was also faced with an urgent need to provide better connectivity options for its guests.

Shorrock says, "Many of our guests view the ability to access documents and e-mail on the go as absolute necessities. Thus, Internet connectivity is one of the basic services that we must readily provide. However, a wired infrastructure would not serve our purposes, since the number of guests, and the layout of events held may change from day to day."

The nature of operations at AJC, however, also necessitated highly flexible configuration settings that could be set up quickly and easily prior to an event.

"Throughout the year, we hold hundreds of events. Each of these can vary widely in size, guest numbers, and general organisation. For example, our 1700 square-metre Randwick Pavilion has, in the past, been transformed into a boxing venue, a car showroom, and even an Australian ecological landscape! The setup and packup time to provide network connections for these events can take up a lot of time. We needed a solution that would allow us to set things up quickly and easily, and at the same time be tailored to the unique needs of different conventions," says Shorrock.

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Network Solution

AJC found its needs would be best served by a Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN) that would enable staff mobility and convenient connectivity for guests. After an assessment of wireless solutions from several vendors, AJC decided upon a Cisco Unified Wireless Network solution to help solve its business challenges

"Not only was the Cisco solution most competitive price-wise, we were already using Cisco technology in our core infrastructure of switches and routers," says Shorrock. "It was only recently, for instance, that we upgraded our switches from a 10 megabyte to Gigabit Ethernet, also from Cisco. We had had a good experience with Cisco, so when the opportunity arose to work with them again, we felt positive about the implementation and outcome of the solution."

The presence of Cisco® core technology, according to Shorrock, also meant that the new Cisco wireless technologies would be integrated seamlessly with their existing hardware. This meant that the "learning curve" for IT support and staff of AJC would be less steep, given the familiarity with the use of Cisco solutions. "We also wanted a wireless architecture that we could manage and monitor from a central location, and the Cisco solution promised us levels of control and manageability that no other competing solution could," he says.

With Cisco's implementation partner EDC providing engineering and consultative expertise, a 10-member team worked to implement a wireless solution. Cisco Aironet Access Points delivered the versatility, high capacity, security, and enterprise-class features needed to cover the entire administration department, 14 function rooms, and selected public access areas at AJC.

Implementation began in January 2007, and was completed over the course of eight weeks. "The implementation process had to be pretty sporadic, because we had to conduct conferences on some days. But despite all that, everything was completed in quite a short length of time. We were impressed with the professionalism of Cisco's implementation partner, and also very pleased with the fact that the new Cisco applications integrated so easily with our existing infrastructure," says Shorrock.

PRODUCT LIST

Switches

- Cisco Catalyst 3750 Series Switches
- Cisco Catalyst 2960 Series Switches

Wireless

- Cisco Aironet 1242 Series Access Points
- Cisco 4400 Series Wireless LAN Controllers

Business Results

With the implementation of the Cisco Unified Wireless Network, logistics needs are met efficiently, as staff can communicate with the central stock system in real time, via wireless personal digital assistants (PDAs). "We deployed our in-house developed stock management application to PDAs, so whenever we have to top up beverage stocks at drink kiosks and mobile food stalls, all our kiosk staff have to do is to use their PDAs to indicate just how much they need. Dockets are then printed in coolrooms, and stock dispatched immediately. The Cisco wireless infrastructure

has given us the option of a mobile application that is absolutely business critical," says Shorrock.

With the Cisco Unified Wireless Network, staff at AJC are making noticeable strides in productivity. "During race days, for example, our own official photographers are able to upload pictures of the race from their laptops to the back office immediately, and do so wherever they are," he says. "These can in turn be relayed quickly to the media, and made available for sale on the race day itself."

Furthermore, the wireless infrastructure has made the provision of connectivity much easier to temporary staff, as well as external consultants. According to Shorrock, AJC has been able to better accommodate any number of external consultants who require Internet access.

With the Cisco Unified Wireless Network, AJC can also now easily set up guest wireless access zones. "During race days and conferences, we usually receive a large number of visitors. With the wireless infrastructure, we can provide connectivity to all these guests, and from one single console. And this is all made possible without having to lay new network points, or move hardware around," he says.

Furthermore, guest wireless access zones are also replete with the privacy and security similar to that of a wired LAN. By creating any number of virtual LANs (VLANs), AJC is able to offer separate networks that can be used securely by internal staff and external users – such as the media, event staff, club members, and punters – without having to make any tedious changes to the physical configurations of the network.

"At functions that might house several individual exhibitors, for instance, our guests are assured that they each have their own virtual network to work in, secure from unauthorised access by other users," he says.

To date, AJC has hosted trade shows, gala dinners, and charity functions in venues fitted with the wireless infrastructure. In each instance, says Shorrock, AJC provided wireless Internet access with



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no problems. “At one of the auction events,” he says, “Bidders were even able to make payments immediately after a purchase, simply by logging onto the auction house’s website with their details.”

Next Steps

Among the applications in the pipeline are tracking capabilities. With an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) Asset Tracking solution, AJC would be better able to prevent the loss or theft of valuable assets, like valuable photographs and trophies, and may extend it to provide services for parents to keep track of their children’s whereabouts..

AJC also has plans to enhance physical security with the link-up of the wireless network to security cameras at various locations throughout the race course. “We already have Closed Circuit Television on fibre optic links, but these links keep getting cut. The wireless infrastructure provided by Cisco will prove vital in helping to solve this, by helping us keep an eye on security 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” he says.

Voice communications will also get a boost with the planned deployment of Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phones. AJC will be able to make voice calls over the wireless network and enable faster, more efficient collaboration between staff.

AJC plans to blanket the Royal Randwick field with outdoor wireless mesh coverage in time for World Catholic Youth Day celebrations in 2008, in order to provide users with secure wireless roaming beyond traditional wireless LAN boundaries.

For more information

To find out more about the Cisco Unified Wireless Network, visit: www.cisco.com/go/unifiedwireless

To find out more about the Australian Jockey Club, visit: www.ajc.com.au



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