



Ascot leaves the field behind with trail-blazing intelligent stadium

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name

- Ascot Racecourse, UK

Industry

- Sport and Entertainment

Business Challenge

- Improve customer experience
- Extract greater value from operations and facilities

Solution

- Intelligent stadium – based on the Cisco Connected Real Estate framework and supported by Cisco Unified Communications

Business Results

- Optimised customer service and handling of enquiries and bookings
- Improved access to information, communications and betting channels for customers
- Better placed for growth with increased Tote transactions and more competitive business and event services
- Cost savings through reduced network complexity, ease of provisioning and centralised control of energy usage

Beyond the striking sight of its magnificent new grandstand, Ascot's successful redevelopment reveals a forward-looking approach to technology. The venue has used the network to put its customers at the centre of everything it does and offer the ultimate race day experience. Like a real thoroughbred, Ascot looks set to pick up more prize money and provide even more dazzling displays in the future.

Business Challenge

The UK's premier racecourse, Ascot aspires to provide its customers – spectators, businesses, VIPs, owners, sponsors, media, retail partners and other visitors – with richer and truly unforgettable experiences. Other business imperatives include the creation of new revenue streams combined with the constant need to drive greater efficiencies from operations, such as security and safety. Realisation of these goals, however, was dependent upon the removal of barriers created by the venue's ageing infrastructure.

Sonia Hamilton, Head of ICT at Ascot, explains: "Separate TDM-based networks meant it was hard to share real-time information and obtain a 360-degree view of the business. It was also expensive to run and difficult to scale. We can have anything between several hundred people for a midweek business meeting and 70,000 at Royal Ascot where we will run around 30 kilometres of cabling to provision IT services for temporary buildings. So being able to 'shrink and grow' is especially important."

A major eighteen-month redevelopment programme – the most extensive racecourse project of its kind in Europe – has seen Ascot transport racing into the 21st century with a magnificent new grandstand and track that represents one of the most impressive sports stadiums in the world. The foundation for this spectacular transformation is based on the Connected Real Estate (CCRE) framework – Cisco's vision for world class buildings that brings together technology and real estate in the most optimal way possible.

Solutions

CCRE uses the power of the network to deploy building intelligence, deliver collaboration and mobility services, and allow building owners and operators to develop new services, revenue streams and business models. At the heart of this strategy is a highly scalable Cisco Unified Communications solution that securely integrates voice, data and video communications – both fixed and wireless.

This intelligent stadium infrastructure enables Ascot to deliver the surround components that 'touch', and therefore contribute towards defining the overall spectator experience, such as pre-event service, facilities management, staffing, betting, safety and security.



The Ascot experience starts with the highest standards of customer service. The previous contact centre solution has been replaced by Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express and the introduction of new feature rich functionality – such as skills-based routing and Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) – that allow agents to deal more efficiently and professionally with enquiries and bookings. The deployment of some 800 Cisco Unified IP phones ensures effective communication across the vast Ascot site.

On race day, Ascot's innovative use of technology goes to work from the minute customers start to turn up at the course. Each turnstile is connected via the IP network to a server that centrally monitors access control and acts as an early warning system for crowd congestion or any technical malfunctions, for example, of the turnstile itself. This ensures that the maximum number of people can enter the venue in the minimum amount of time. Digital signage can also be integrated for rebranding or advertising purposes or to help manage in the event of emergency situations.

“When you consider that we can peak at upward of £1 million in tote bets a day – all of which are placed wirelessly by our couriers using PDAs – our network simply has to be secure. Cisco’s track record and proven technology provided us with the high degree of reassurance and confidence that we needed.”

—Sonia Hamilton, Head of ICT, Ascot Racecourse

Once inside, over 30 channels of content are broadcast to 900 permanent screens and 400 temporary screens that are brought in at peak times across the course, providing race-goers with the very latest news and information. Highly flexible control capabilities allow Ascot to cater for individual requests, for example, from customers in a box who may want to watch racing beamed in from around the world. The same screens are also used to direct people to pre-race entertainment.

A fully integrated wireless network provides customers with a highly available, efficient and personalised betting service in areas where it was previously cost-prohibitive to do so. Effectively turning the racecourse into one huge Wi-Fi hotspot, customers can place bets with ease using a number of channels – either directly through the Tote (a government-owned organisation for pool betting in the UK, of which Ascot receives a share of revenue), via 500 self-service mobile stations using credit cards or via couriers operating in the restaurant, bars and hospitality areas. In time, contract staff who provide catering and cleaning services will also be connected to the wireless network via PDAs, enabling them to provide improved service and to reduce inefficiencies in the management of supplies.

Network security and management is provided by two Cisco Secure access servers and Cisco Network Management tools that allow Ascot’s IT team to execute routine tasks, such as moves, adds and changes without having to leave their desks. The network will be linked into a building management system to allow site facilities to be controlled remotely over IP. This will provide maintenance staff with the ability to diagnose faults or adjust heating, lighting and ventilation settings from the comfort of their homes.

Business Results

A future blue print for the industry, Ascot has created an intelligent stadium that will help to transform customer experience and optimise financial performance. Increased access to information, communications and betting channels has been positively received by customers.

The network also plays an important role in helping Ascot to mitigate risk. Sonia Hamilton says: “When you consider that we can peak at upward of £1 million in tote bets a day – all of which are placed wirelessly by our couriers using PDAs – our network simply has to be secure. Cisco’s track record and proven technology provided us with the high degree of reassurance and confidence that we needed.”

Unified communications has helped to enhance Ascot’s growing reputation as a business and events arena capable of hosting everything from state-of-the-art conference and training facilities to stylish weddings and fine dining banquets. Multi-purpose functions can now be accommodated with ease, re-using the same infrastructure to deliver high-speed data, audiovisual or wireless services or even to set up an Internet Café.



The impact provided by this newfound adaptability is illustrated by a recently hosted technology exhibition. Before the event would have cost Ascot around £2,000 just to provide ADSL lines plus the hidden costs resulting from damaged flooring and skirtings. Sonia Hamilton says: “Having instantly available IT services means that we no longer have to pass these charges on to our customers – making the venue more attractive, competitive and better placed to win more business.”

Positive contribution to revenue is complemented by the way Ascot’s technology platform has created additional cost savings from reduced network complexity, simplified infrastructure management and centralised control of energy usage.

Next Steps

In terms of the future, Ascot is already looking to leverage its investment. Plans are currently being considered to further improve safety and security by converging all walkie-talkie and mobile devices onto the IP network. Other initiatives include storage virtualisation to improve video archiving and the possible trial of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) to protect and track valuable assets on site. Ascot is assessing the viability of smart card technologies to work together across its value chain of retailers, caterers and betting partners. Location-based services that identify customers and enable the venue to better profile and target opportunities are also in the pipeline.

Janet Walker, acting Chief Executive at Ascot, summarises: “Our partnership with Cisco provides a secure platform to deliver all the various interactions, transactions and sensations that combine to create the ultimate customer experience of a day at Ascot – whether that is ensuring ease of entry to the course, top quality betting services or maximum enjoyment in the bars, restaurants and corporate areas.”

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For Further Information

To find out more information go to
<http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/sw/voicesw/index.html>.

Product List

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst 3750 and 6509 Series Switches
- Cisco 3845 Integrated Services Routers
- Cisco Voice Gateways

Voice

- Cisco Unified Communications Managers
- Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express
- Cisco 7940 and 7960 IP phones
- Cisco Unity

Mobility

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

Network Management

- Cisco IOS Software
- Cisco Network Management tools

Security

- Cisco Secure Access Control Servers
- Cisco PIX Firewalls



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