Hosting one of the most watched sporting events—the US Open—the United States Tennis Association (USTA) relies, without exception, on its powerful network to communicate across numerous constituencies. This ranges from managing internal interactions to supporting numerous retail transactions and broadcasting tournament information across the globe. With intensely competitive matches played by world champions, the event is a celebration of tennis unlike any other.

Held late summer every year in Flushing Meadows, New York, the US Open holds the distinction of being the highest-attended sporting event worldwide. As such, its network infrastructure, security and functionality must perform seamlessly and without fail. To ensure the network’s optimal performance, the USTA has partnered with Insight since 2005 to develop and maintain cutting-edge solutions that meet its complex requirements.
Insight Rallies Wireless Network and Wireless Mesh

The longstanding relationship between the USTA and Insight initially began during 2004’s US Open when its network was infiltrated by a ‘Day Zero’ virus. It was imperative to address the impact on functionality and security. Referred by solution partner Cisco, the Insight team performed technological triage to restore operations. Insight also recommended a review and rebuild of the existing infrastructure—particularly since technology itself had significantly evolved.

Subsequently, the USTA chose Insight to undertake a top-down redesign of the USTA and Open network infrastructure. After conducting a comprehensive assessment, Insight proceeded to completely re-engineer the network environment. Clearly, secure wireless capability was critical. Insight deployed the Open’s first NAC (network access control) wireless network and incorporated its Managed Services to maximize security with a double layer of backup. During every Open since, Insight teams are on site in the network bunker, monitoring the health of every wireless access point, and in turn are supported by Insight’s Network Operations Center in Tempe, Arizona. As Alan Prefer, Insight Account Manager says, “Over time, our relationship with the USTA has evolved—we’ve become their infrastructure consulting partner.”

In 2008, Insight partnered with the USTA to build and launch its wireless mesh, which is generally defined as a mesh network created through wireless access points (nodes) at each network user’s locale. Users serve as providers, as data is forwarded to the next radio node. In this way, the networking infrastructure is decentralized as each node only has to transmit to the next. For the Open and its numerous vendors operating largely in kiosks scattered around the immense tournament site, wireless mesh is an efficient, agile method by which to manage not
only thousands of retail transactions, but also share constantly changing information about player rankings and match results, often in video formats. “Every year, we treat the USTA as if it were a brand new client—auditing every aspect of systems to ensure they will be robust enough to serve the next Open’s needs,” Alan Prefer relates.

Clearly, network security and a successful Open are mission-critical priorities. To that end, Insight conducts security and network assessments every year before the Open to verify that the infrastructure is both secure and able to support any technological innovations scheduled to be deployed. In this way, potential issues are identified and resolved before the three-week event takes place. As Larry Bonfante, USTA CIO says, “I know we’ve had a good Open when no one knows who I am.” He appreciates the proactive nature of the Insight relationship. From his business perspective, the network is a powerful asset for advancing efficiency across operations. Ultimately, the USTA and the Open operate as a multi-million dollar business; the network’s role in maximizing productivity plays a pivotal part in meeting objectives. As Mr. Bonfante remarked at the 2009 Open, “Our relationship with Insight is not just that of a client-vendor relationship; it’s a partnership. The USTA is a $220 million corporation that does 85 percent of its business in three weeks; it is critical that everything functions seamlessly.”

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Insight teams located both on site in the network’s mission control center and remotely at the Insight Network Operations Center keep a watchful eye on every aspect of network operations. On a 24x7 basis, teams monitor performance, maintain functionality and resolve any emerging issues—ensuring uninterrupted, uncorrupted transmission of vital data. “Insight lets us know about outages even before the carrier does,” comments Carlos Lakomy, IT Director at the USTA. Again, given the Open’s real-time nature it is vital that the network stays up and secure. Prior to the Open’s start, after all refinements, upgrades and testing are completed, the network is ‘locked down’ until after the Open concludes. Whether on- or off-site, the combined strength and expertise of the Insight team responds to potential network issues at every level of complexity with rapid, effective solutions.

Solutions and Outcomes

Insight continues to play an invisible, yet integral role in guests’ enjoyment of the Open. In managing the network, auditing its performance, upgrading functionality and ensuring security, Insight works behind the scenes to help ensure a successful event. Technological innovations like NAC wireless networking and wireless mesh technology have raised both standards and expectations of network reliability, security and flexibility—for both the USTA and the thousands hosted every August. By developing and maintaining enduring relationships with partners like Insight, the USTA is assured of the expertise and experience necessary to keep the Open on top of its game.
Much like tennis itself, the USTA and the Open’s network infrastructure is built and maintained in a ‘team’ context—Insight works in close partnership with the USTA to ensure smooth and seamless network operation. Beyond implementing leading technologies, Insight’s primary objective is to assist the USTA in delivering a major sporting experience to a myriad of fans on site and worldwide—all of whom have come to expect excellence on and off the court. To that end, Insight’s network solution is designed to ensure that the full spectrum of the Open’s business operations is seamlessly and professionally delivered, year after year, to an ever-expanding audience.

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