Hewlett Packard Enterprise

Objective
Upgrade entire network to meet requirements of Premier League

Approach
Developed plans with long-term IT partner, Medhurst Communications

IT Matters
- Delivers a fully verified and tested IT infrastructure, capable of supporting long-term development
- Creates a robust network, simplifying management and maintenance for one-man, in-house IT department

Business Matters
- Meets stipulated requirements of Premier League
- Establishes the club as a tier one sporting venue, with world-class media and IT facilities

AFC Bournemouth strengthens long-term fortunes with Premier League promotion

HPE switches underpin vital network infrastructure upgrade

AFC Bournemouth is a footballing fairytale. After nearly going out of business less than 10 years ago, the club has risen to the Premier League, the pinnacle of English football. But admittance to the big leagues means an upgrade of the club's infrastructure. HPE technology underpins the revamp of the club's IT network.

Challenge

A rapid rise
Football is full of underdog stories. AFC Bournemouth might be one of the best.

On the first day of the 2009-10 football season, 2,998 fans turned up to watch Bury play Bournemouth in the fourth tier of English football. Bournemouth had narrowly avoided relegation from the League the previous year and had nearly gone out of business. Little was expected of the team this term.

The 3-0 win at Bury heralded an upturn in Bournemouth's fortunes. The club went on to secure promotion to tier three. It followed this with promotion to tier two in 2013, and in April 2015, for the first time in the club's history, won promotion to the Premier League – the pinnacle of English football, and the world's richest football league.

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The club did this with the same manager and many of the same players. Behind the scenes, the IT infrastructure had changed little in five years.

Big money, bigger expectations
The Premier League sold its latest round of domestic broadcast rights, 2016-19, for £5.136 billion, a 71 per cent jump on the previous deal. It is estimated overseas TV rights will bring in a further £1 billion per year.

In return, the broadcasters expect a certain standard of 'product'. Every Premier League club is required to provide world class infrastructure, from the quality of pitches, to floodlights, to catering. It all adds to the Premier League experience.

The IT infrastructure is no different. Clubs must host the world's print and broadcast media on every match day. They must provide interview areas, conference rooms and media zones, all with the appropriate level of connectivity.

The Premier League has a lengthy list of technical requirements, from the number of concurrent users to data points to broadcast cabling standards. From 2016, each of the 20 Premier League clubs will be guaranteed at least £80 million per season, though the payments are conditional on all requirements being met. For newly promoted clubs, the challenge was twofold: upgrade their infrastructure immediately, and ensure they avoided relegation.

"Perhaps we didn't want to tempt fate but we never started planning for life in the Premier League until we knew for certain we'd been promoted," says Richard Poole, AFC Bournemouth's IT manager. "That left us 13 weeks to plan and implement the upgrade. I can't tell you how crazy this summer was."

Solution

Upgrading the network
The club had worked with Medhurst Communications, a local technology support service specialist, for a number of years.

"We've worked with them on small jobs and ad hoc support, but nothing on the same level of resource as this," says Poole. "That said, we'd always used them as a sounding board, imagining what's possible, if and when we'd need it."

"By the time promotion was on the horizon we knew what we needed to do, and I knew that Medhurst knew our set up. Our IT department is just me; we were never going to do this on our own."

The new media facility requirements included an integrated fibre optic and copper cabling network to provide both wired and wireless internet connectivity for all visiting UK and international broadcasters and data ports and connection points for all media conference rooms, outside broadcast compounds, tunnel interviews and pitch side presentations.

With internet connectivity bandwidth of 40MB per second, burstable to 100MB per second, the club has dramatically improved the internet service for all broadcasters. There is a 250MB broadband connection from Bournemouth data centre provider, C4L.

"The Medhurst proposal centred on HPE," says Poole. "I had no issue with that. We've been using more and more HPE technology, from laptops to servers, and that had created a level of confidence. HPE was the right choice; with the warranty and support it was the best, fully-backed solution."

The new IT infrastructure comes with a lifetime warranty and the best of breed Hewlett Packard Enterprise switching technology (HPE E5412, HPE E8212 and HPE 2920) across the entire site. It includes a purpose-built air conditioned comms room containing four racks housing all the new HPE servers and switches. Medhurst staff will continue to support the AFC Bournemouth IT staff on site.

"The Medhurst guys have played an enormous part in understanding our business over the years," says Poole, "so when it came to tight deadlines, they were on the money."

Benefit

Ready for kick-off
The solution was in place, tested and fully operational by late July, for a pre-match friendly with Cardiff City FC. "A massive achievement," according to Poole.

The network upgrade meets all Premier League requirements and leaves Bournemouth in possession of an IT infrastructure for the future – whatever the team's fortunes on the field. The upgrade allows for a new telephone system, IPTV and IP CCTV across the site, and extends to a new, purpose-built players pavilion and 1,500sqm outside broadcast area adjacent to the stadium.

Customer at a glance

Hardware

• HPE E5412 Switch Series

• HPE 8212 Switch Series

• HPE 2920 Switch Series

"This upgrade takes us to the next level. This is a club with huge ambition; we have an IT infrastructure for the 'now' and for the future."

– Richard Poole, IT manager, AFC Bournemouth

"From the media room to the shop and the stands, there is no weak point," says Poole, "and no threat of connectivity dropping off."

The club will be using the new technology to support its community and engagement projects and to be able to work closer with local businesses. The conference and events facility now has 50 data points and improved wireless access for guests. Poole says discussions have taken place regarding match day Wi-Fi connectivity for the 12,000 fans in the stadium: "There are a whole host of consumer-focused services we're looking at – ordering food for smartphones, cashless payments, access control – all of which are now possible. We're creating a better match day experience for fans."

For Poole, the day-to-day benefit is in having just one system to manage: "I can isolate issues quicker and I have technology that has been fully tested and verified. This upgrade takes us to the next level. This is a club with huge ambition; we have an IT infrastructure for the 'now' and for the future."

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