

Australian Open takes tennis to millions of online viewers worldwide with IBM

Overview

■ Business Challenge

Deliver an entertaining and engaging experience to tennis fans worldwide; cost-effectively scale to support 100 times normal capacity for just two weeks each year

■ Solution

A hosted technology infrastructure that cost-effectively transforms data into rich content and flexibly adjusts to fluctuating demand

■ Key Benefits

50% increase in Web site traffic from previous year; 100% Web site availability; 40% reduction in cost per visit since 2004; 23% reduction in energy consumption since 2004; 25% reduction in cooling demands since 2004



In January 2008, Australian Open staff watched as traffic to its Web site grew nearly 50 percent. It was a significant achievement for Tennis Australia, the organization responsible for Australian Open, and one that represents the franchise's success in bringing fans around the world closer to the ultimate tennis experience.

How did the organization do it?

According to Tennis Australia staff, the ability to leverage information in new ways and serve it up in real-time without interruption is helping raise the organization's game.

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“In the past few years, we’ve introduced a number of innovations to help improve the amount and types of information that we can disseminate to tennis fans worldwide, to the media, to officials and to the players themselves,” says Dr. Chris Yates, Chief Information Officer, Tennis Australia. “It’s drawing excitement for the game and engaging fans.”

Helping make this possible is IBM, the Official Technology Partner of Australian Open. Since 1993, IBM has played a major role in Australian Open, providing the event infrastructure and manpower to support all facets of the tournament—from event management to the end-to-end scoring system that feeds all the organization’s information channels, including the Web site, on-court scoreboards, results kiosks, graphics interface for television broadcasters and Match Update Centre.

“We essentially grow from a small-to-medium-sized business to something the size of a small city and we only have two weeks to pull it all together,” explains Chris. “IBM technology is at the heart of the tournament. It provides an end-to-end solution that reduces the complexities for our team and enables us to achieve flawless delivery.”

Offering a virtual seat to the action

One of the organization’s most visible efforts to increase the tournament’s fan base is the AustralianOpen.com Web site, which IBM designs, publishes, produces and hosts. In 2008, a record of 7.4 million unique users visited the site more than 30 million times generating nearly 220 million page views. This represented a 50 percent increase in traffic over the previous year.

Helping drive this dramatic increase has been new features such as IBM SlamTracker. With SlamTracker, fans can now interact with the draw and see their selected players and the schedule integrated within the draw. An interactive venue map allows fans to see what’s happening on all courts with active matches. Fans can roll their mouse over the map to see who’s playing on each court and, when a court is selected, can follow the match on the upper-scoreboard area. Demonstrating the popularity of this feature, there were more than 6 million downloads of the SlamTracker application during the two week tournament.

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What’s more, Chris emphasizes, this is all done in real time, helping solidify the popularity of the site.

“Getting the information out quickly is critical,” says Chris. “IBM provides us with live feeds into the Web site so fans worldwide can follow the action as if they were sitting courtside. This has made a significant difference.”

Non-stop action

During the two weeks of Australian Open each year Tennis Australia must shine. As a result, Tennis Australia needs the Web site to be 100 percent available, scalable and secure. To do this, IBM uses a flexible, self-managing infrastructure based on Service Oriented Architecture (SOA), and multiple geographically dispersed servers, virtualized as one, to scale up to support a massive increase in traffic of more than 100 times its typical volume. It then scales down when the tournament is over—without complicating IT management and without the need for Tennis Australia to make a large and costly permanent infrastructure investment.

“We have one basic rule and that is never to let the technology get in the way of tennis,” says Chris. “Working with IBM, we’ve been able to ensure that our infrastructure can handle all our requirements without a problem.”

And, as Chris points out, IBM has kept the action going even when the unexpected occurs.

“None of us anticipated a 50 percent increase in site traffic this year,” says Chris. “But even with this huge increase, we never experienced any sort of problem with speed or information availability. There was no downtime or any issues whatsoever.”

Protecting its investment

Any high-traffic Web site can easily become a target for hackers and the Australian Open Web site is no exception. On the first day of the Australian Open, more than 12,000 attempts to access the site were blocked. Protecting the site is a sophisticated security system from IBM that enables:

- *Real-time analysis and prevention of malicious Internet attacks before they gain access to the AustralianOpen.com infrastructure.*
- *Automatic detection of any active security threats, risky user behavior, performance issues and security policy violations.*
- *Mitigation of threats and supplemental support to existing firewalls and intrusion prevention technologies.*
- *Centralized management and monitoring of the security systems.*

Solution Components

IBM Service Management Solution:

Service and Application Provisioning,
Application Availability, Energy
Management, Security Compliance

Solution Components:

- IBM Enterprise Workload Manager
- IBM Proventia® Network Intrusion Prevention System (IPS)
- IBM Proventia Management SiteProtector
- IBM Proventia Network Anomaly Detection System (ADS)
- IBM Tivoli® Monitoring
- IBM Tivoli Enterprise Console®
- IBM Tivoli Provisioning Manager
- IBM Tivoli Security Compliance Manager
- IBM BladeCenter®
- IBM System p5™ 550 Express servers with POWER5™
- IBM System i5® 520 running Linux® on POWER™
- IBM Global Business Services
- IBM Global Technology Services

IBM Application Integration & Infrastructure Solution

Solution Components:

- IBM DB2® Express
 - IBM DB2 for Linux
 - IBM Workplace™ Web Content Management
 - IBM WebSphere® Business Integration Server
 - IBM WebSphere Message Broker
 - IBM WebSphere Application Server
 - IBM Retail Store Solutions
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Advantage Australia

Like many organizations today, Tennis Australia has faced shrinking IT budgets and rising energy costs while having to deliver more services to its constituents. Through numerous IT innovations, IBM is helping Tennis Australia overcome these challenges.

For example, by virtualizing the environment so multiple workloads can run on the same physical server, IBM has reduced the number of servers required to support the Australian Open Web site from 60 servers to just 9 servers. This has driven tremendous savings in both cost and energy consumption. In fact, since 2004, while visits to the organization’s Web site have grown by more than 33 percent, the cost per visit has been reduced by more than 40 percent. Energy consumption has been reduced by 23 percent and cooling demands by 25 percent.

Similarly, the implementation of IBM technologies to create a Service Oriented Architecture offers a flexible platform for continued innovation. With this platform, Tennis Australia can distribute and transform scoring information where and when it’s needed. This infrastructure enables the organization to deliver nearly 250 million score updates to fans worldwide without missing a beat.

Additionally, by using a SOA approach, changes to both content and presentation styles can be easily incorporated so the organization can add new features each year and staff can easily address last-minute tournament changes. For example, in creating SlamTracker, IBM was able to reuse code from the IBM On Demand Scoreboard and present the data in a new way, without adding complexity or impacting the backend applications.

Delivering game-changing insight

IBM has also helped Tennis Australia provide players with the information they need to take their games to the next level. One key example is the Match Analysis DVD that IBM creates for men’s and women’s singles matches at the Rod Laver and Vodaphone Arenas. With these DVDs, players and coaches can search the video by point, set or statistic, such as unforced errors, to analyze the player’s performance and make adjustments accordingly.

“The Match Analysis is a huge plus in supporting our players and providing them with the resources they need to develop their game further,” says Chris.

Keeping the pressure on

Each year, Tennis Australia and IBM deliver additional services to help attract new fans and support the players. And 2009 is expected to be no exception.

“We want to expand what’s available to the players on the Web site so they find their draws and get the information they need,” says Chris. “In terms of the fans, we want to keep increasing the information available and enable fans to personalize their experience by building their own Web pages with the information that they want from Australian Open.”

In the end, it will not only improve the tennis experience, but drive better business outcomes as well for Tennis Australia.

“Ultimately our mission is to make Australia the greatest tennis-playing nation in the world,” says Chris. “Being able to keep fans involved and give players the information they need is essential in helping us meet this goal.”

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For more information

Contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit us at:

ibm.com/technologyservices

For more information about Tennis Australia and the Australian Open, visit:

AustralianOpen.com

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