

Back of the Internet: Arsenal puts fans first with premier league hosting platform



Customer: Arsenal Football Club

Installation: UK

Industry: Sport

More at: www.ntteuropeonline.com

Premiership football club teams up with managed hosting specialist NTT Europe Online to offer fans quality online experience.

Overview

An important part of Arsenal Football Club, Arsenal Broadband Limited (ABL) has ultimate responsibility for the Arsenal brand across all digital media, including online, stadium screens and on-field electronic advertising. Its main portal is Arsenal.com, the club's official website and the number one point of contact for fans interacting with the club via the Internet.

The importance of performing well home and away

ABL needed a reliable platform for its central website, Arsenal.com. As the gateway to its digital brands, its online ticketing system, Arsenal TV Online and the main point of contact for Arsenal FC's international fan base, it had to provide round-the-clock availability. Failure to do so would detract from its fans' online experience and damage potential digital revenue.

Arsenal.com witnesses enormous spikes in traffic from all corners of the globe as the club signs top players (Andrei Arshavin's signing in February 2009 generated a 1000

per cent increase in traffic in 24 hours) and competes for glory in the UEFA Champions League and FA Premiership. It generates 40 million page impressions and 3.5 million unique users a month, and also delivers a regularly-updated stream of audio, video and match updates to an audience that stretches far beyond North London. 60 per cent of its traffic comes from international locations, which means it needed to provide a responsive, dependable browsing experience to fans based both home and away from its main server bank.

ABL also needed to ensure the site was completely secure, as well as being scalable. With traffic to sporting websites inextricably linked to key events such as matches, competition draws and player signings, Arsenal.com needed to be able to withstand spikes without compromising the user experience. It needed a managed network which would react to global traffic requirements, giving it the bandwidth and capacity to guarantee a quality user experience.

Trevor Diamond, Head of Technology at ABL, said: "We have a commitment to our fans, ensuring they get the best possible experience of the Arsenal brand online, equivalent to that of the Emirates stadium

and team. Equally important, we need to deliver profit and value to our shareholders and drive revenue for Arsenal football club, helping secure the future and growth of the club as a whole."

In all, ABL needed a hosting partner that could provide a consistently high-level of service, deploy a global IP network, and guarantee the high performance of its online assets.

Technically-gifted players

NTT Europe Online (NTT) were initially suggested by Arsenal.com's web development agency, Rippleffect, with which it continues to work closely. ABL was aware of NTT's reputation as an expert in providing sporting organisations with platforms to suit their needs (working with the likes of UEFA, ITF and the IAAF), and decided to partner directly with NTT. This allowed ABL to benefit from NTT's technical expertise, consultancy and personal customer service.

NTT provides an available, secure and scalable hosting platform for Arsenal.com, delivering key information to fans, as well as regular blog, podcast and vodcast updates. Arsenal.com is hosted on NTT's European content delivery network (CDN) – a network of servers in Frankfurt,

London, Paris and Madrid which receive updates from the central Arsenal.com origin servers, and subsequently deliver this content locally, ensuring a smooth user experience for fans across the globe.

"We have a global fanbase, with people logging on from the US to Asia and everywhere in between. It's testament to the capacity and capabilities of NTT's European-based CDN that we don't need servers on every continent in order to handle this international traffic, which is extremely helpful from an investment point of view," says Diamond.

The CDN also contributes to ABL's business continuity planning, reducing the pressure on server loads alongside built-in redundancy should any hardware go down.

"Redundancy planning is critical to our operation," Diamond said. "We need constant availability, so if a server goes down, our site still needs to be running. With the redundancy NTT has built into the platform design, it's the same as being able to substitute an injured player during the run-of-play, and ensures an absolutely seamless performance."

In addition to technology, another reason for NTT's selection was its ongoing relationship with ABL and its attitude towards customer service. "NTT is not a faceless organisation and I would never do business with a faceless company," Diamond said. "I want to be able to speak to real people that know their stuff. We have a dedicated service manager that I can pick up the phone to at any point."

A bright future for a team in form

"Out of everything we do at ABL and all our responsibilities, NTT is the one part of our operations I don't have to worry about. It just works, and I would recommend them without hesitation," Diamond said. "We see our managed hosting provisions as people see gas and electricity at home; essential for our existence, and you just want to be able to take it for granted that it's there, and it works, which means I can concentrate on other parts of our business."

ABL is looking to grow traffic to Arsenal.com and drive additional revenues for the club. Future plans include continued video growth as the distinction between TV and online continues to blur, providing its fans with fast access to highlights and goals as quickly as possible. It has also opened up a USA site, capitalising on its link with MLS team Colorado Rapids.

"Arsenal Broadband Limited is a critical part of Arsenal Football Club, providing a touch point for fans and generating revenue for the PLC," Michael Leavey, General Manager at ABL says.

"As the club and our international fanbase grows, we will have further opportunities to dynamically engage with our fans and generate revenue online. Working with NTT, I have complete confidence that they can support us as our business moves forward."

Arsenal Football Club is based in Holloway, North London. Founded in 1886, Arsenal are one of the most successful clubs in English football, winning thirteen First Division and Premier League titles and ten FA Cups. They hold the record for the longest uninterrupted period in the English top flight and are the only Premier League side to have completed a season unbeaten. Arsenal's home for over 90 years was Highbury before they moved to the Emirates stadium in Holloway, in 2006.



NTT Europe Online

NTT Europe Online provides managed hosting, application management and security management solutions to enterprises globally. These solutions give the reliability, availability, security and scalability needed to underpin business success online.

NTT Europe Online is a wholly owned subsidiary of NTT Communications, the international arm of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Group (NTT Group), one of the largest telecommunications companies in the world.

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