

The PGA TOUR sees green with an on demand, realtime scoring solution.

Overview

■ Challenge

The PGA TOUR recognized that to draw new spectators and boost revenues it needed to enhance the fan experience—one way being through the introduction of innovative multimedia offerings

■ Why Become an On Demand Business?

By transforming its business with realtime data collection and dissemination, and by outsourcing hosting operations, the PGA TOUR planned to raise the value of its brand, lower IT costs and manage expenses more effectively

■ Solution

Transforming the scoring system facilitated the development of innovative, multimedia offerings based on previously unavailable realtime data

■ Key Benefits

Increased revenue and fan base; ability to meet the needs of key customer groups by recording every shot by every player on every hole; ability to handle significant surges in traffic



Fans can follow their favorite players in realtime online through TOURCast, no matter where players are on the course. They can even watch them play against another player who isn't in their group.

More than 26 million Americans play golf, making it one of the most popular participatory sports in the United States. Participation in the sport has grown more than sevenfold since 1950, and, with 16,000 golf courses in existence and 200 more being added every year, golf promises to keep growing into the future. And with the influence of the PGA TOUR, golf is also a rapidly growing spectator sport.

“We needed to be a source of innovation in the presentation of the game. It was important to capture the imagination of our audience and continue the growth of our brand.”

—Steve Evans, vice president of information systems, the PGA TOUR, Inc.

Anticipating and responding to customer and market demands in realtime

On Demand Business Benefits

- Variable pricing model enables the PGA TOUR to offset expenses with new revenues and to minimize its up-front investment
- New interactive realtime Internet services increase fan base, generating new revenues from existing assets (golf scoring information)
- Ability to focus on meeting constituent needs while relying on IBM to provide technology and hosting services
- Enhanced realtime data enables broadcasters to be more effective, creating a positive impact on viewership
- Golf fans worldwide can follow who they want, when they want, shot by shot, increasing interest in the TOUR's golf events around the world
- Resilient, on demand solution designed to capture, process and deliver scoring data to multiple channels—in a variety of compelling formats
- Improved speed, accuracy and breadth of tournament scoring data collection
- IBM Linux virtual services provide virtual Linux servers with mainframe scalability and processing power on a pay-as-you-go, utility computing model
- Open-standards-based environment helps facilitate integration with other business processes and partner applications, boosting revenues

Based in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, the PGA TOUR (www.pgatour.com) is a nonprofit membership organization that promotes and administers professional golf tournaments and related marketing activities. The TOUR operates over 110 events serving nearly 600 players, on three national U.S. tours: the PGA TOUR, the Champions Tour and the Nationwide Tour.

Wanting to continue growing its revenues and increasing fan loyalty, the TOUR decided to introduce new cutting-edge television and Internet programming. "We needed to be a source of innovation in the presentation of the game," says Steve Evans, vice president of information systems, the PGA TOUR. "It was important to capture the imagination of our audience and continue the growth of our brand."

With an out-of-date scoring data collection system, the TOUR was unable to provide its Internet audience with unique, compelling insights and the realtime interactive experience that is expected by the online audience. As the staff explored new applications that could leverage enhanced data, the TOUR realized that it needed expanded technological capabilities without expanding its IT staff. However, increasing fixed costs and employee expenditures were not viable options.

Seeking ways to attract new fans

Maintaining golf's position as a successful spectator sport essentially meant increasing the value and marketability of the PGA TOUR brand. For that to happen, viewership numbers had to continue to increase. "In order to build viewership, we knew we needed to transform the presentation of the game literally from the ground up—starting with a new way to collect enhanced data on the golf course to graphically show more features than ever before," says Evans. "Just like all other sports, we needed to provide entertaining, exciting features that show new perspectives on the game to be responsive to our audience."

The PGA TOUR also had to ensure that, for any new subscriber-based application, it could align costs with revenues on a pay-as-you-go pricing schedule. "Rather than invest in IT assets—staff as well as hardware and software—we needed to pay for IT resources on a variable model, paying only for what we used." By obtaining increased capacity as needed, the TOUR would reduce costs, accommodate audience peak demands and offset expenses with revenue-producing services.

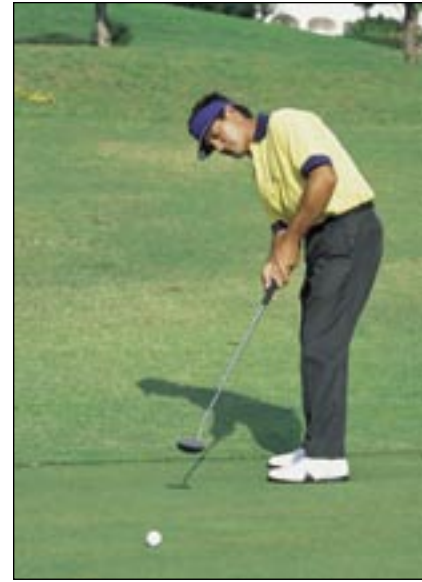
Responsive solution provides excitement on demand

To boost revenue and enhance the fan experience, the PGA TOUR created three new systems to capture the game's action and to transform that action into an exciting, responsive multimedia experience for golf audiences. ShotLink provides the realtime scoring information that forms the basis of the TOUR's new enhancements. It improves the speed, accuracy and breadth of tournament scoring data collection—combining on-course information with feature maps of each tournament course—to provide detailed scoring information to spectators and media onsite, and to fans on the Web. TOURCast enables golf fans to follow tournament action for every player, hole and shot at PGATOUR.com. And TournamentTracker is the PGA TOUR's intranet system that provides realtime results to produce statistics and graphics for broadcasters, media and onsite spectators.

With realtime scoring information and its three new applications, the PGA TOUR can massage its data and produce fresh and captivating features to attract new audiences. For example, thanks to TournamentTracker, television producers can show graphics comparing the first shots to a particular green or demonstrating the effect of the wind for all the players. "This is the kind of information that sharpens viewers' appreciation for the skill and strategy involved in golf and ultimately raises the value of the game's assets," says Evans.

And by partnering with IBM, the PGA TOUR has been able to maintain its laser-sharp focus on rolling out new marketing programs to keep its audience growing.

With a variable cost structure for IT hosting provided by IBM Global Services, the PGA TOUR has lowered IT costs. Since its capacity demands are driven by subscription services, it is always assured of having income to offset its expenses. "This is a very favorable cost structure for the PGA TOUR," says Evans. "We can continue our focus on increasing revenues and fan loyalty while keeping our expenses in line."



The PGA TOUR offers a wide range of programming to satisfy the interest of fans who can't make it to the event.

“Our IBM on demand solution has changed our ability to interact with fans. Having a rich application like TOURCast allows us to reach out to several different audiences.”

—Steve Evans, vice president of information systems, the PGA TOUR, Inc.

Key Components

Software

- IBM DB2® Universal Database™
- IBM WebSphere® Event Broker

Servers

- IBM @server® xSeries® 335
- IBM @server iSeries™ 730
- IBM @server zSeries®

Services

- IBM Managed Hosting—Linux virtual services
 - IBM Global Services—Application Management Services
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ShotLink provides responsive scoring system that supports innovation

Turning to longtime sponsor and vendor IBM, the TOUR embarked upon a multiyear project to collect realtime scores on the links, process them for delivery to television, the Internet and onsite facilities, and create a myriad of enhanced spectator features. The ShotLink solution for collecting realtime scoring information is based on data points collected by volunteers who “shoot” the balls with lasers when they land, determining their position. The volunteers carry hand-held devices that capture the information and transmit it wirelessly to a base station at the ShotLink Mobile Data Center designed by IBM and the PGA TOUR. The ShotLink system collects this information on 11 IBM @server® xSeries® 335 systems and uses a CORBA-based object model for data exchange to integrate this scoring data with the numerous applications that use it.

TOURCast delivers the whole game of golf

TOURCast is the TOUR's subscription-based Internet service. With TOURCast, fans can track live tournament play from their home or office, customize the tournament experience to watch their favorite players or holes, enhance their television experience by getting more information on a shot, hole or player, compare players head-to-head on the actual holes played and much more.

The TOUR's intention wasn't simply a matter of copying the scorekeeping and presentation technologies other sports had used. “Golf isn't like football or baseball,” Evans explains. “In golf there can be more than 100 players on 18 holes playing simultaneously. We knew it would be a challenge, but we felt that in order to produce the most compelling products we had to collect, analyze and present data from every player on every hole, on every shot.”

For TOURCast, a digital connection conveys ShotLink data to the TOUR's headquarters, where the data is archived using IBM DB2® Universal Database™ on an IBM @server iSeries™ 730 system. From headquarters, the data is transmitted in XML format to the IBM Linux® virtual services IBM @server zSeries® system at the IBM e-business Hosting™ center.

Because TOURCast runs on a managed, utility-like Linux service hosted by IBM, the TOUR pays only for the capacity it needs, when it needs it, so that costs don't outpace revenues. The virtual Linux servers have the power of a mainframe at a fraction of the cost. "From my perspective, we have a common, user-friendly Linux server that has tremendous capacity—and it's being managed by IBM," says Evans. "That means the system is always available, regardless of traffic peaks."

TournamentTracker provides statistics and graphics for media

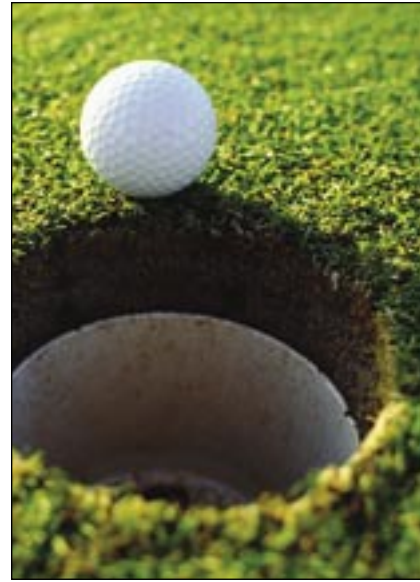
For the tournaments themselves, IBM Global Services - Application Management Services created TournamentTracker—a Java™ technology-based intranet application. TournamentTracker provides a course layout and enables fans, reporters and commentators to follow the stroke trails of the players. The application includes innovative analytics, enriching the television-viewing experience with information that traditional reporting systems have not been able to provide.

TournamentTracker utilizes XML and HTML messages and IBM WebSphere® MQ Event Broker software—a publish-subscribe software product. The latter transmits the messages to users based on the content they request.

Open standards-based, integrated environment provides flexibility

Using the Linux operating environment, XML, WebSphere software, Java and other open-standards-based technologies, IBM and the PGA TOUR have created an infrastructure for developing new applications quickly to meet audience demands and thrive in an intensely competitive media market. The open environment enables the TOUR to integrate applications across its business much more easily than would otherwise be possible.

For instance, ShotLink generates a Final Ranking and Payments listing that is integrated with the PGA TOUR's Players' Prize System. The system automatically calculates payments and cuts prize money checks for the players. Payments are timely and accurate and require no additional staffing. The new IBM on demand technology environment also enables the TOUR to share data with partners like Sky Sports, NHK, Golf World and the Associated Press so they can integrate the TOUR's data into their applications, increasing the value of the TOUR's assets.



To catch the latest hole-in-one action, golf aficionados can log on to TOURCast for realtime scoring powered by IBM technologies.

“Beginning with the new ShotLink scoring technology, IBM has helped us to focus on our own business and do much more with it.”

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Helping the PGA TOUR focus on business

With its IBM scoring solution, the TOUR can now focus on helping broadcasters gain value and insight from the data and create new opportunities to generate revenue by providing enhanced services to its audiences and customers. "Beginning with the new ShotLink scoring technology, IBM has helped us to focus on our own business and do much more with it," says Evans. "Now we can leverage all our assets, including golf tournaments and TV coverage. At the click of a mouse, Internet viewers can see all the action on all the holes on a course—a service that they are willing to pay for."

The PGA TOUR is also finding new ways to respond to viewers' tastes in sports media. And some of the data TV broadcasters are using is actually transforming golfers' games.

As Evans explains, "We never had the detailed stats to help explain the differentiation of the TOUR players. With ShotLink we are now able to dissect the game and find out exactly how a player won an event or what has contributed to his success over a given period of time. For example, we know that Tiger Woods is the TOUR Leader over the past five years in Par 5 Scoring Average and has significantly improved his scrambling statistics over the past two years. Jim Furyk is the best on the TOUR in Approach Putt Performance. Davis Love is ranked third in Approach Shots from greater than 200 yards. Our IBM on demand solution has changed our ability to interact with fans, too. Having a rich application like TOURCast allows us to reach out to several different audiences."

For more information

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11-04
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