F1 Consultancy delivers key IT infrastructure for UK's leading international television event

The decision to go 100% digital for the BBC Showcase 2008 meant that it was imperative that a number of IT and IT infrastructure issues be resolved, so that the Showcase, a key event in BBC Worldwide's business calendar, could be delivered.

In 2008 BBC Worldwide commissioned F1 Consultancy Limited to design and implement a suitable IT infrastructure for the UK's leading international television event - BBC Worldwide's Showcase 2008.

Critically, BBC Worldwide had decided to switch to a 100% digital, on demand video service, and required a seamless transition to this new service giving instant feedback on programming viewed by potential buyers.

Ultimately this feedback resulted in significant improvements to BBC Worldwide's sales analysis, and F1 Consultancy being appointed again in 2009 and 2010.

Background

BBC Worldwide is the main commercial arm of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and as such it aims to create, acquire, develop and exploit media content and brands around the world to maximize the value of the BBC's assets for the benefit of the UK license payer. BBC Worldwide is a wholly owned subsidiary of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Following a highly successful pilot at the BBC Showcase 2007, BBC Worldwide took the bold decision to go 100% digital for its Showcase 2008. F1 Consultancy Limited were tasked with providing the expertise and IT infrastructure required to deploy a Storage Area Network (SAN) capable of supporting 2TB of BBC programming (over 1,000 hours of television input) streamed seamlessly to 550 Digibooths (HP PCs).

BBC Showcase is the world's largest trade show of its kind hosted by a single distributor. The four day event typically sees BBC Worldwide generate programme sales and broker international funding deals for co-productions on behalf of the BBC and independent producers.

Our solution would need to be customized to suit the overall requirements of BBC Worldwide, support its reputation as industry leader, and provide a flexible and timely viewing experience to visitors at Showcase 2008 which mirrored the BBC iPlayer experience.

F1 Consultancy's experience and expertise in the delivery of IT infrastructure at events was called upon to help resolve three main challenges for the BBC so that they could effectively equip Showcase 2008. These were:

• Current viewing methods were considered antiquated and relied on the use of DVDs.
• The BBC needed to easily access BBCWorldwide titles from a central source.
• The BBC wanted to recreate the viewing experience available to anyone using BBC iPlayer.

Elements such as the physical location of Showcase 2008, technical factors including a lack of storage and network, and finally BBCWorldwide's reputation for excellence and leadership all contributed to the challenges faced by BBC Worldwide in their bold decision to switch to 100% digital.

Objectives

The challenge was to design a Storage Area Network (SAN) capable of supporting over 1000 hours of programming – all of which could be viewed simultaneously from all 550 Digibooths available to potential programme buyers. In addition, the project required that the 550 PCs for the Digibooths would need to be suitably configured, deployed and supported throughout Showcase 2008.

F1 Consultancy was also tasked with monitoring the network integrity during the event and with the provision of an overview of BBC Worldwide's application to any BBC Worldwide guests on request.

Solution

Pre-planning and research formed core components of F1 Consultancy's implementation strategy, and enabled F1 to deliver an integrated strategy on behalf of BBC Worldwide as well as meet the tight timescales of the project.

During the research phase of the project, we developed an integrated strategy to align the physical deliverables of the project, i.e. SAN, the 550 Digibooths, ongoing project support, and the overall customer experience. Long-term goals were identified for the IT infrastructure, and milestones were established to drive the implementation timeline forward.

Events, by their very nature, often result in a shortage of time. Therefore, pre-planning and pre-staging were used strategically by F1 to ensure a smooth and timely delivery process throughout the whole of Showcase 2008.

The new Digibooths gave all buyers a bespoke video on demand service, and allowed them to give instant feedback on programming they viewed.

This significantly improved BBC Worldwide's sales analysis at the event.

The Show opened and ran without a hitch. The project team worked tirelessly in a pre-staging environment covering every possible eventuality that could be encountered at the event itself. This preparation was invaluable in meeting the tight timescales the project team would encounter at the event.

F1 Consultancy deployed and attached 550 PCs over a fibre network to a dedicated SAN in one day at the venue, in readiness for a full system test the following day. In the lead up to Showcase 2008 the following key issues were identified and addressed by F1 Consultancy:

• Improved efficiency
• Enhanced user experience
• Ease of use
• Better quality
• Simplification
• Video on demand.

The transition of moving buyers from a DVD library to a 100% bespoke video on demand service was an unquestionable success. The success of this transition was due to the meticulous planning and testing the BBC/F1 project team completed prior to the actual event in February 2008.

Critical success factors included dealing with short turn around times, updating an antiquated viewing system by replacing the current DVD model with 550 Digibooths designed to recreate the BBC iPlayer experience, as well as ensuring that a tailored Storage Area Network was in place to support 1000 hours of BBC television programming.

In addition, BBC Worldwide set the industry standards in terms of television distribution events and therefore it was imperative that the solution F1 deployed continued to uphold this standard. Our years of technical event experience married with our highly skilled staff means that F1 are perfectly placed to provide the IT infrastructure needed to deliver show-stopping events.

Importantly, F1 Consultancy helped BBC Worldwide to deliver to its buyers a state-of-the-art video on demand service which resulted in a significantly improved sales analysis at the end of Showcase 2008. Also, the new systems in place improved overall efficiency, enhanced and simplified the user experience, and supported BBC Worldwide's brand as world leader in events of this kind.

F1 Consultancy

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