



Atlanta's Mercedes Benz Stadium Drives the Ultimate in Fan Experience with IBM Storage Solutions

Delighting fans with safe, convenient access to world-class sports and entertainment

Stadiums today compete with entertainment options streamed directly into every home. To create a destination that drives fans to attend live events, the Mercedes-Benz Stadium uses both on-premises and cloud-based IBM® Storage solutions to feed content to screens throughout the stadium. This way, fans never miss the action on the field or the stage.

Challenge

With compelling digital content at everyone's fingertips, Mercedes-Benz Stadium wanted to keep inspiring people to leave their living rooms and attend live events.

Transformation

Flagship Solutions Group and IBM created a powerful hybrid storage landscape built around IBM Elastic Storage Server with IBM Spectrum® Scale, IBM Storwize® V7000 and IBM Cloud Object Storage.

Results

- Thousands of display screens fed with original video content thanks to high-speed data storage
- 5:1 consolidation of environments facilitated by transition to a single management platform
- 71,000 viewers at a time can share digital experiences, supported by IBM Storage

About Flagship Solutions Group

Flagship provides IBM solutions, managed services, and cloud solutions worldwide. These include data center strategic planning and hybrid cloud implementations based on a wide range of assessments that look at virtualization, server consolidation, security, and infrastructure-focused integration. Flagship's managed services include cloud-based server monitoring and management, 24x7 helpdesk support, and data center infrastructure management.

AMB SPORTS+
ENTERTAINMENT





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- Danny Branch, CIO, AMBSE

The Business Challenge

Putting fans first

In the internet age, compelling content is always just a click away. Living rooms boast audio-visual set-ups that can rival movie theaters on quality, while pay-per-view can bring world-class sports and music events into every home. These competing attractions make it more challenging than ever for live-event venues to fill their seats.

Building Mercedes-Benz Stadium gave AMB Sports & Entertainment (AMBSE), which runs both the Atlanta Falcons and Atlanta United, the opportunity to put fans front and center. By radically reimagining what a sports and entertainment venue could be, AMBSE aimed to deliver an unprecedented experience to fans.

Danny Branch, CIO at AMBSE, says: “We needed to re-engage with fans and really create a destination for incredible experiences, whether at Falcons football games, Atlanta United soccer matches or concerts. When we started building this venue, the number one priority in technology was to create a future-flexible infrastructure able to support what the business wanted for the fans today, but also what they might want for the future.”

Debra Naderhoff, Senior Director of IT Infrastructure at AMBSE, adds: “Our secondary focus in technology was to accommodate the diverse needs of hundreds of AMBSE employees across multiple sites. We faced a unique challenge: creating from scratch an infrastructure to support not only a world-class live-event venue, but also multiple office spaces.”

Transformation story

World-class experience

Chairman Arthur M. Blank challenged stadium executives to create a venue that would push the limits of what was possible in stadium design, fan experience and sustainability. AMBSE worked with the State of Georgia to create the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. The stadium is an innovative, multi-purpose venue with exceptional environmental credentials.

Knowing that the optimal fan experience seamlessly blends real and digital interactions, AMBSE selected IBM as its prime technology contractor to ensure that fans would have a highly connected, fully immersive experience like no other. The world-class experience for fans begins the moment they enter the stadium grounds, with digitized parking and ticketing that expedites the entrance process. Immediate connectivity to fast, free Wi-Fi allows fans to

share their experience on social media, view engaging content, and find everything they need in the stadium: concession and merchandise stands, restrooms and, of course, their seats.

“We want to deliver an engaging experience from end-to-end: from the moment a fan leaves the house to when they return home,” says Branch. “IBM played a key enabling role in this digital immersion with its Unified Stadium Technology Platform.”

Full digital immersion

As the name suggests, the Unified Stadium Technology Platform is a single, integrated network that serves all data requirements at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, connected to the IBM Cloud and backed by world-class security, data-protection and disaster-recovery systems. Built around a 4,000-mile passive optical network, the platform feeds 15,000 wired access points, 1,800 wireless access points, more than 800 HD CCTV cameras, more than 2,000 video screens, 3,200 loudspeakers and the world-famous Halo Board: a 63,000-square-foot, 360-degree HD video display visible from every seat.

The 4K video files that drive the Halo Board are valuable original content assets that require vast amounts of disk capacity. To store this video content, together with many thousands of hours

HD content from the security cameras, and data from various AMBSE business systems, IBM worked with its Business Partner Flagship Solutions Group to design and implement an enterprise-class hybrid storage environment.

The IBM storage solution is built around IBM Elastic Storage Server, which uses IBM Spectrum Scale technology to consolidate all file and object workloads into a single software-defined storage pool with a single namespace. The Elastic Storage Server at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium currently has 4.5PB of capacity; block storage requirements are served by an IBM Storwize V7000 array with 1PB of capacity, including enterprise flash capacity as tier zero, with disk storage for the remaining tiers. Data backup from the Storwize V7000 is managed using IBM Spectrum Protect Suite, first to additional on-premises hardware, and from there to IBM Cloud Object Storage.

“On the IT side, we wanted to do the right thing, not just copy what had been done in other places,” says Naderhoff. “IBM came to us with a truly different approach to the infrastructure. Rather than having to keep track of four or five different environments, we wanted a single place to manage all stored data, including event video and security video; IBM and its partner Flagship achieved that. That was a big win for us, because whenever you standardize and consolidate, you reduce costs.”

“The support from Flagship is invaluable. Given the amount of video data we have here and the criticality of backup, we need highly specialized support. For an organization of our size, it’s great that we can rely on Flagship rather than needing to retain our own specialists in-house.”

- Debra Naderhoff, Senior Director of IT Infrastructure at AMBSE



Dependable services

AMBSE has two managed services agreements with Flagship; one for storage management, including updates and upgrades, and one for backup and disaster recovery.

“We feel like we can really count on Flagship,” says Naderhoff. “I’ve been in IT a long time, but their support and management are unsurpassed by anything I’ve ever seen. Everything works as expected, and the IBM storage is engineered the way storage should be engineered. “We had a very short timeline and we were working in a challenging environment as the stadium was being constructed at the same time, but the IBM Storage solutions worked like a charm right from the get-go.”

In addition to storing offsite backups for AMBSE, the IBM Cloud hosts several critical applications for stadium operations, including concession and suite catering applications. It also hosts the web front-end for Fan Experience apps built by IBM iX, which help fans navigate transportation to and from the stadium, park their cars, buy and use digital tickets, and find their way around the facilities.

Results story

Building fan loyalty

AMBSE’s goal is to ensure that fans feel connected and engaged at all times, whether attending an NFL game, an MLS match or any other event in the stadium. By using IBM technology to deliver immersive video content, world-class safety and security, and helpful apps, AMBSE keeps fans coming back for more.

“IBM solutions are a key enabler of the outstanding experiences we provide—both physical and digital—for up to 71,000 fans at a time,” says Branch. “Our IBM Storage solutions feed compelling original content to thousands of screens and to the enormous Halo Board so that fans never miss the action.

The IBM solutions also made for fan-friendly retailing: our Fan Experience team uses security camera footage to reduce lines at concession stands by redirecting fans to alternative points of sale.”

“We knew we needed an innovative partner, and IBM did a fantastic job on the infrastructure,” Branch continues. “IBM also brought Flagship to the table, and we have a close ongoing relationship with both, because our challenge now is to keep innovating. Flagship and IBM handle the technology back-end so that we can focus on providing exceptional experiences to our fans.”

Great events start with great storage

AMBSE’s focus is on planning and running world-class sporting and entertainment events. A comprehensive package of services from IBM and Flagship helps keep the all-important technology running smoothly.

“The support from Flagship is invaluable,” adds Naderhoff. “Given the amount of video data we have here and the criticality of backup, we need highly specialized support. For an organization of our size, it’s great that we can rely on Flagship rather than needing to retain our own specialists in-house.”

In addition to delivering event-related video content, the IBM storage environment plays an important role in assuring the safety and security of fans in and around the stadium. If a safety-related issue occurs during an event, the control center has reliable access to footage from multiple angles, helping stadium staff respond rapidly and appropriately.

“On an event day, everything needs to work reliably so that fans can enter the stadium, enjoy the event and all the ancillary video content, and then leave the stadium in a safe and efficient way,” says Branch. “In that sense, a positive fan experience ultimately depends on consistent, high-performance data storage—which is precisely what IBM provides to AMBSE.”

Take the Next Step. Contact Flagship.

To learn more about the solutions discussed here, or how you can achieve similar results with IBM Storage solutions, contact Flagship Solutions Group by email at sales@flagshipsg.com, or by phone at 561-208-3941.