

CASE STUDY

KÖNIG-PILSENER-ARENA ESTABLISHES DIGITAL PLATFORM TO CREATE 'SMART VENUE' OF THE FUTURE



Large public venues have some of the most demanding network challenges in business. Huge spaces stand empty for 90% of the week, then they are packed with thousands of customers for a couple of hours.

Whether they are there to see sport, music or theatre, those customers want a memorable experience. And, though they come for the main event, each of them wants immediate access to the network and massive bandwidth. "The fact is, people want to be online all the time," says Henrik Häcker, Managing Director, SMG Entertainment Deutschland GmbH a trademark of ASM Global.



WORLD-LEADING CONNECTIVITY

König-Pilsener-ARENA is a multipurpose events venue in Oberhausen, Germany, built in 1996. It is part of the giant ASM Global group, which manages more than 300 venues around the world.

The arena in Oberhausen offers one of the best connectivity experiences of any venue in the group. At peak times, when the venue is filled to its 12,555 capacity, König-Pilsener-ARENA can provide up to 6Mbps of bandwidth, free of charge, in parallel, to every guest.

"No one was thinking about digitisation when we opened in 1996," says Häcker. "Today, digital is everything. Our promoters, our operations and our customers demand connectivity."

Unifying a disjointed network

The König-Pilsener-ARENA engaged Aruba in 2017 to overhaul connectivity throughout the venue.

"At the time we had a disjointed approach, with different access points for retail, for ticketing, and for our offices," explains Marc Hausmann, IT Manager. "It was horrible to manage and maintain."

REQUIREMENTS

- Provide simultaneous connectivity for a minimum of 6,500 visitors
- Simplify network management and supervision from a single platform
- Create new touchpoints for visitors and generate meaningful data for commercial partners

SOLUTION

- 802.11ac High-Density Indoor & Outdoor APs
- Mobility Controllers
- Mobility Conductors
- ArubaOS
- Aruba Campus Core & Access Switches
- ClearPass Policy Manager and NAC
- AirWave network management

OUTCOMES

- Enables the venue to scale up bandwidth to 12Mbps per visitor
- Creates a more dynamic retail environment, with flexible Point of Sale roll-out
- Generates the data to inform future promotions
- Enables real-time sales monitoring
- Provides a digital platform for tour promoters to engage with audiences
- Establishes world-class connectivity infrastructure, increasing competitiveness vs. other venues

“ The event business is getting more digital. We have to be prepared for the future, and the Aruba solution is our base for further innovation. ”

HENRIK HÄCKER

MANAGING DIRECTOR, SMG ENTERTAINMENT
DEUTSCHLAND GMBH, A TRADEMARK OF ASM
GLOBALS

The solution is now built on 150 Aruba 802.11ac Wave 2 indoor and outdoor access points. High-density 310 series APs for the indoor areas, weatherproof HD 370 series APs and 340 series Smart Rate Unified Campus APs in outdoor areas. Each had to be mapped and directed accurately to deliver a consistent signal and optimal coverage throughout the arena. Aruba 5406R Campus Core and 2930M Campus Edge switches provide the robust wired backbone for the Wi-Fi. The APs are controlled via two Aruba 7210 Mobility Controllers, and a Mobility Conductor. ArubaOS 8 delivers Zero Touch Provisioning of new components, uninterrupted service during automated live updates and many more capabilities to the IT team. The estate is monitored and managed through AirWave for a single pane of glass experience.

Staff and corporate network access are secured and provisioned via ClearPass and this service may be extended for public Wi-Fi in the future. Current public Wi-Fi access is contracted to an external third-party provider but is routed to the Aruba network.

"We looked at four solution providers and Aruba was consistent in its message throughout," says Hausmann. "They provided us with a clear recommendation, explained what we'd need and kept to their word and delivered. All the others changed their stories along the way.

"Also, we visited the Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara to see Aruba in action. It was clear that if Aruba can work at that scale then they could work here."



Free, simple network access for all visitors

The venue is now able to offer free Wi-Fi to all customers. Access is limited to 30 minutes; customers then have to log in again and see a message from a commercial sponsor.

The König-Pilsener-ARENA wants to look at usage trends before considering long-term options. It could offer a premium, paid-for service; Häcker says a corporate sponsor is a possibility. With the level of data obtained from the network, the team can start to build strategies and plans around customer, user and crowd engagement and value-add services.

"Our priority was to make sure the network worked, and that users had the access they needed," says Häcker. "We've seen other venues make big promises and then fail to deliver. That hasn't happened here."

ONLINE COMPLEMENTS THE LIVE EXPERIENCE

Häcker admits to being stunned by the take-up. An average event will generate 30,000 logins; the peak has been nearer 100,000 – meaning users are connecting for new, separate 30-minute sessions five times in an evening.

"For some, particularly younger audiences, you can't be at a live event without also being online," he says. "We see this trend continuing to grow."

From a marketing perspective, this generates a huge amount of user data and allows the arena to deliver appropriate commercial messages ahead of every new log in.

Increasingly, says Häcker, tour promoters want multiple channels to promote their product. One recent tour, sponsored by a European car manufacturer, used the venue's connectivity platform to promote its new products in connection with a digital and personalized autograph card of the artist.

"We can now work with partners to create more dynamic, tailored messaging around an event, and for the demographic," says Häcker.

Adaptable and quick to change

The network is also easier to adapt and manage. Hausmann says the solution was designed to provide visitors with 2MB bandwidth, but as usage trends have become more established, the venue can adjust accordingly and in real-time.

"We've gone up to 4MB and 6MB where we've needed," he explains. "For some smaller events, we've even stretched to 12MB for 2,000 users and still had plenty of headroom. It's a lot easier for us to check demand and respond accordingly."

The König-Pilsener-ARENA also runs a host of operational functions off the network. All PoS and ticketing at the venue is digital. New retail spots can be set up in moments.

"We can view sales activity in real-time," says Hausmann. "If we know there is a busy outlet, we can connect a mobile kiosk in minutes, or set up food trucks outside the arena. The new PoS connects automatically with the Aruba network."

Creating the venue of the future

The next phase will be able to layer location-based services, including promotions and signage. The arena sits adjacent to Europe's largest shopping mall, CentrO, and in one of the most populous areas of Germany. Häcker says there is an opportunity to link a visit to the arena with other retailers and attractions in the area.

The events industry continues to innovate. Large public venues must prove they can adapt, says Häcker. Virtual reality is coming, he continues. Big stars, not keen on doing 200-date, year-long global tours, are exploring the idea of VR simulcasts to multiple venues at one time. Häcker admits the technology and pricing model needs perfecting but says the venue has to be prepared.

"The event space is getting more digital," says Häcker. "We have to be prepared for the future, and the Aruba solution is our base for further innovation."