Cricket is changing. The arrival of Twenty20, a shorter form of the game, has helped attract a new demographic to cricket. Crowds tend to be younger, more exuberant, and expectant of a great sporting experience.

Somerset County Cricket Club (SCCC) is one of England’s leading clubs. It has embarked on a complete digital transformation journey which it hopes will accelerate success. The hope is that this digital strategy will transform its commercial and on-field activities – and create the most engaging fan experience in English cricket.

**A MORE DEMANDING DEMOGRAPHIC**

Based in Taunton, in the West Country, SCCC is far removed from England’s cricketing hotspots, but continues to punch well above its weight.

“Our aim is simple: we want to be the best,” says Suzanne Roper, Commercial Sales Director, SCCC. “On the field and off.”

She says the club, and cricket in general, needs to catch up with the digital experience of other sports. Spectators, commercial partners and coaches are a lot more demanding in terms of access to Wi-Fi.

“Fans want to engage with social media throughout the game. They also expect live replays of key moments,” says Roper. “For this audience, high-performance wireless is non-negotiable. Cricket has often lagged behind other sports in that respect.”

**Doing things the Somerset way**

Neeing to overhaul its ageing wireless solution, and due to host three matches at the 2019 Cricket World Cup, SCCC began the search for a long-term solution. The England & Wales Cricket Board, which was overseeing the Cricket World Cup, offered an off-the-shelf solution managed through a service provider.

“This would have been fully tested and easy to deploy”, says Sarah Trunks, SCCC’s Strategy Director, “but would have been too generic.”

The club, she continues, prefers to do things “the Somerset way”.

“We wanted something that worked for us, long after the World Cup has left town. In particular, we wanted to fully own and optimise the data we’d be collecting, and to effectively manage different network users.”

**Resilient, high-performance and with granular visibility of user behaviour**

The network upgrade is built entirely on Aruba Edge Architecture. It includes a total of 110 high-density internal and external Aruba access points (including 305, 325, 335, 365, 375 and 377), a fully resilient
cluster of two Aruba series 7220 Mobility Controllers managed by a Mobility Master and AOS 8. The campus core is powered by an Aruba 5406R switch with full resilience in place and a total of 16 Aruba 2930M campus edge switches provide connectivity for each pavilion, stands external areas and CCTV connectivity and much more. The infrastructure is overseen by Aruba AirWave.

The solution ensures high-performance network access in and around the ground, and is able to accommodate 9,000 concurrent connections. It ensures 100% uptime, with built-in failover and high-availability. Ongoing support and service management is provided by Aruba's long-time partner, ITEC.

In addition, the Aruba Analytics and Location Engine (ALE) provides rich data about connections, devices and user to a Skyfli Analytics platform which allows SCCC to have full visibility on crowd behaviours and movements across the site.

SUCCESSFULLY SUPPORTING A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION EVENT

Trunks says the Aruba upgrade has been a complete success. All areas of the ground now enjoy high-performance wireless and the club now has a baseline from which to build. For club matches, more than 10,000 spectators have signed up for wireless access in the first three months of service. Every one of SCCC's Twenty20 matches for the 2019 is a 7,500-seat sell-out.

SCCC successfully hosted its three World Cup matches, each match a sell-out, each with more than 100 of the world's media in attendance, all expecting flawless connectivity. Post event, the ground was voted by fans as the best of all the eleven venues, with excellent Wi-Fi coverage. "The World Cup was great for proving our decision worked, conducted with the eyes of the world on us," says Trunks. "It's given us the confidence that we have a strong network in place."

Going forward, the Aruba solution, designed and deployed by ITEC, enables SCCC to gather, keep and manage its own data. Trunks says she was never comfortable with a service provider solution, and the possibility of third parties having access to the club's members, commercial partners or event customers' data: "We now have control over how we use our data. This is critical for us."

She sees this data informing the club's strategy going forward, whether it is mapping busy areas of the ground, or personalising sales and marketing messages for fans. Similarly, it will enable the club to get closer to its events' customers (the events business accounts for nearly 20% of annual revenues and dominates the off-season).

“It’s also easier for us to manage the network, certainly in terms of how the network is being used and the different access we grant to different users,” Trunks says. “Aruba AirWave is an invaluable tool.”

SECURITY AND DATA PROTECTION

The new network at SCCC offers a mine of valuable data. With this, Trunks and her team are committed to the highest levels of security. This cannot be at the expense of seamless access and sign-on to the network for fans, collaborators, staff, and commercial partners.

The Aruba Edge Architecture, including software such as AirWave and controllers' interface, enable ITEC to define intelligent device and user profiles. Based on these profiles, users, devices, and things can be assigned to secure VLANs.

“During the World Cup, we detected a rogue access point on our network which was causing problems. Using AirWave, we drilled down to the exact location and details of the device,” said Trunks. “The culprit was identified and contacted, and the device was quarantined. This is the level of control and insight we now have on our network to protect our business and our users.”

In the near future, SCCC will be looking at the implementation of Aruba ClearPass Policy Manager. This will give them the ability to automate all policy implementations. “There was simply not enough time to do all this before the 2019 World Cup,” explains Trunks. “But we know we have potential for further innovation and safeguards and we have a clear roadmap of how to achieve them.”

Accelerating the digital journey

Roper acknowledges SCCC is only at the start of its digital journey. The coming years will see the club begin to add greater features and functionality. An app is planned for 2020, with a host of features for club members. Streaming HD match coverage, replays, and audio commentary will provide an in-ground content experience equal to that available to viewers at home; the stadium will become ticketless; there will be ‘service-to-seat’ for food and drink customers.

“We’re very pleased with the progress, but we have much to learn,” says Roper. “We’re looking at how other sports do things – many U.S. sports are way ahead of us. But we recognise we’re not just competing with other sports.”

“Cricket is now a family attraction, competing for a family’s leisure spend. There are service-ideas we can take from throughout the leisure industry.”

Applying a digital layer to improve the overall cricketing experience

No one comes to a cricket match for the Wi-Fi, and the digital experience must remain secondary to the physical. But Roper says the club is excited about the ways this ‘digital overlay’ can add to the overall experience.

“We can send tailored messages to fans and ensure no one misses a moment of the action. We can track queues or create promotions that are relevant to individuals,” she explains. “Everything is in place to drive major improvements to the fan experience.”