

Tampa Bay club uses tech to reach fans on phone, employees in homes, and keep hackers out of the NFL Draft



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Tampa Bay Buccaneers Director of IT Sam Hart understands that a championship team requires championship-caliber technology. Innovative tech is the “wow” factor that wins both fans and employees.

“Several years ago, there was a general approach to just maintain what we had,”

Hart said. “But over the last few years, we have tried to expand our technology with a new server environment, new phone system and more network redundancy.”

In fact, just as the football team has added new players to make it the best in the National Football League, Hart and his team introduced new technology changes that put the Bucs ahead of other teams, such as adding innovative features to the phone app used by fans. The Bucs were one of the first teams to support mobile ticket purchases, and visitors in the stadium can use their mobile devices to order food, access discount cards, make payments, or watch plays from multiple camera angles.

“Fans want everything on their phone,” Hart said. “Our technology investments, especially a more robust WiFi capability within the stadium, means we can give them what they want.”

Hart turned to Lumen Technologies to significantly expand network capacity as well as add diversified circuits to provide redundancy. In fact, the stadium now receives up to 26 Gig capacity through multiple routes. And while these investments directly contributed to a better



fan experience, they really scored a touchdown when the Covid-19 pandemic forced the team to adopt remote work arrangements in 2020.

At the time, only a few of the roughly 200 people who work for the team even used Virtual Private Network (VPN) connections and simply went to the office to access the company's applications or data. NFL mandates changed all that, and suddenly Hart had to address a slew of new connectivity challenges. In addition to expanding VPN capabilities, the IT team needed to work closely with employees to help them maximize their own home bandwidth, so they could use video conferencing and other solutions.

The NFL's decision to run the 2020 Draft remotely added to the challenge, especially when it came to security.

"With no other sports going on, the Draft had a higher profile than in the past, and that made it an attractive target for hackers. You didn't have the security of working in an office, and as you can imagine there is a lot of top-secret stuff taking place during the event," he said.

"As cyberattacks become more common and sophisticated, Lumen offers a platform with integrated security built-in, from the core to the edge. It helps us stop attacks before they happen," said Michelle Hogan, Lumen Sales General Manager.

The pandemic summed up nicely what Hart considers the biggest challenge facing any IT leader—you must be flexible enough to handle whatever the future throws at you. And that's one of the reasons why he values Lumen as a partner.

"There is a constant need for more bandwidth and the amount of the increase always exceeds expectations," said Hart. "For example, our marketing team is always looking for new capabilities to add to our phone app to improve fan experiences. Lumen provides both flexibility and speed, and often delivers what we need faster than requested, while its global platform offers access to new solutions to meet the unknown challenges of the future."

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