



Microsoft Customer Solution

Case study

495 Million Reasons Why World Cup 2003 Proves a Big Hit for International Rugby Board

"We were able to show our commitment to spreading the global visibility of rugby by providing our most extensive online tournament service ever."

Mike Miller

Chief Executive Officer
IRB



With a worldwide television audience of 3.5 billion, the Rugby World Cup (RWC) was the world's biggest sporting event in 2003. It is the showpiece of the International Rugby Board (IRB) – the organization that administers the sport – and the financial engine that drives the development of rugby worldwide. Using Microsoft® technology and within a timeframe of only 14 weeks, the IRB created a robust and secure online publishing system that met the demands of editorial teams in London and Sydney and millions of rugby fans in 194 countries. The system handled usage levels that on occasions saw four million Web pages opened per hour and provided live match updates from stadium sideline to Web site within seconds. Published in English, Spanish and French, the RWC 2003 Web site also included live match audio, video replays of matches and an archive of statistics. The intelligence collected about site usage will be applied to plan future sites and solicit potential sponsors, while the platform and functionality now in place will be employed on other IRB business projects.

CUSTOMER PROFILE	BUSINESS SITUATION	SOLUTION	BENEFITS
<p>Founded in 1886 and with headquarters in Dublin, the International Rugby Board (IRB) is the governing body for the game of rugby, now played in more than 100 countries.</p> <p>The day-to-day business of the IRB is conducted by more than 40 staff. Its showpiece event is the Rugby World Cup (RWC), which in 2003 generated a substantial profit.</p>	<p>The IRB needed a simple yet robust content publishing system capable of running not only the RWC 2003 Web site, but also the sites it will build for other major rugby tournaments over the next three years. The content included data, audio and video, as well as links to an online store of rugby merchandise. And it all needed to be completed in three months.</p>	<p>The Microsoft® content management system deployed by the IRB delivered news, match statistics, live commentary, an archive of previous matches and information about the Australian cities and stadiums where games were held. More than 495 million hits were recorded on the web site during the tournament – 45 million on the day of the final.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Massive exposure for rugby. ▪ Compatibility with existing technology. ▪ Functionality that can be used for other IRB Web sites. ▪ Fast, simple, browser-based system accessible from anywhere. ▪ Capture of user stats for IRB planning, potential sponsors. ▪ Live tracker and statistical updates during matches.

“Scoring the world’s largest sporting event this year involved many moving parts and technical experts working in partnership. Managing a live system with this much information means constant assessment and rapid response.”

Andrew Barkla

*Vice-President & General Manager
Asia-Pacific
Unisys*

Situation

As the governing body of a sport played in more than 100 countries, the International Rugby Board (IRB) is a multi-million dollar organization responsible for the advance of rugby. Every four years, the IRB stages its showpiece event – the Rugby World Cup (RWC). Contested by the sport’s leading 20 nations over six weeks, the RWC is the third-biggest event on the world sports calendar, behind the Olympic Games and World Cup Soccer. It brings together the world’s best rugby players for a 48-match tournament telecast live to 3.5 billion people.

Although steeped in the tradition of a game that traces its roots to 1823, the IRB has been at the forefront of technology use, especially for the purpose of disseminating information. Following the success of the official Web sites built for the Olympics of Sydney 2000 and Salt Lake City 2002, the IRB wanted to create an online experience to emulate those events. It also wanted to deploy technology that could be used again for future IRB tournaments.

For RWC 2003, held in 10 cities around Australia, the IRB envisaged a Web site that included match and player statistics, live audio and video, full replays of matches and an archive of previous tournaments. It had to be driven by a quick and easy publishing process that would allow a team of 10 producers in London and 21 journalists in Sydney to compile up-to-date information. It also had to be browser-based, so no matter where production staff were in the world, with the correct authorization they could access the system and publish material.

The editor of the IRB Web site, Dominic Kelly, explains the project had both short and long-term requirements.

“It was the biggest sporting event in the world for 2003 so we needed a world-class news and information Web site that was worthy of the event,” Kelly says. “That

was the short-term requirement. But we also wanted a system we could reuse for future tournaments, such as the RWC in France in 2007 and other IRB tournaments like the Under 19 and Under 21 World Championships.

“We didn’t have much time to build a Web site for this World Cup, so we needed a solution that was not only easy to control, robust, reliable and would meet our high standards, but also one that could be delivered in three months.”

And, as if the time constraint and amount of information required wasn’t difficult enough, the site also had to be published in English, French and Spanish.

Solution

In 2002 the IRB conducted a lengthy selection process to identify a suitable content management system for its online properties. The IRB chose a system based on Microsoft® Content Management Server 2002, as part of a wider IRB technology strategy built around Microsoft products. The project team comprised of Unisys as the official IT Supplier for the 2003 Rugby World Cup and Microsoft Consulting Services, invited through the strong relationship with Unisys, as application developer for the Web site.

The system consists of two servers running Content Management Server that allow authors to create and modify content; a clustered Microsoft® SQL Server™ 2000 database that holds all the tournament statistics; and a Web usage analytics server that allows detailed analysis of usage patterns. It also has two servers hosting interactive Web games and email newsletters for subscribers; two servers that run Microsoft Operations Manager 2000 to monitor the Web site infrastructure; and two domain controllers that provide authentication and authorisation.

The massive volume of visitor traffic to the Web site was handled by nine Web servers.

The RWC 2003 project also demanded the content management system be able to communicate with other information sources, such as the tournament's main database. So while a site structure was created through Microsoft Content Management Server 2002, procedures to store data and show information such as match results, player details and updated tournament statistics needed to be incorporated.

"We did a lot of research into possible solutions," says Kelly. "We were already working to IT strategies based on Microsoft standards, and we thought it best to keep consistent with those standards since we were facing such a tight deadline. So, apart from the huge imperative to get the solution working in time, there was a comfort factor for us attached to the expertise of the Microsoft name."

The IRB's IT Manager, John Corbett, says Microsoft Content Management Server 2002 was chosen for its price, ease of use, solid strategic fit with other Microsoft products at the IRB and the availability of product expertise through a wide network of Microsoft partners and Microsoft Consulting Services. However, Corbett says there was some trepidation about using products that were so new at the time, especially when it came to integrating them with other technology.

"There were minor hiccups concerning integration, but overall the project was a success," Corbett says.

"The World Cup site was built and managed with technology that can now be used to maintain other IRB sites. This has obvious advantages, such as centralized hosting for all sites and training on a single system. It's also easy to transfer functionality and data between sites."

Compuware provided testing tools to help Microsoft and Unisys developers simulate millions of users hitting a system. These tests were conducted by Devtest.

Benefits

Corbett says he was impressed that the content management system for the IRB's major event was delivered on time and on budget, with the full functionality required. He says this was a result of the expertise of Unisys and Microsoft Consulting Services.

Speed and Ease of Use

Both Corbett and Kelly say the strengths of the browser-based system are its simplicity and speed at publishing information on the Web site. For example, match statistics got from the sideline to the Web, television screens and journalists within 10 seconds. It could have been even quicker but minor sacrifices regarding workflow were made because of the launch deadline. However, the system is designed so it is easy to make adjustments and add functionality that would make the time-to-publish 40 percent faster.

High Usage of a Content-Rich Web Site That Generated Revenue

Through its RWC production team in London, the IRB offered a premium service for a one-only payment of US\$25 that included access to all parts of the site, live audio, video highlights and full replays of all matches 24 hours after completion.

Kelly says there was "solid" uptake of this service, especially by rugby fans in the US, where matches were not shown on television until three days after they were played.

"We derived significant income from this service," says Kelly. "The main RWC site was also the major referrer for the online merchandise site. We had many visitors move on to the rugbyworldcupstore.com,

"Microsoft Consulting and Unisys delivered a solution with all the functionality we needed – within budget and within the required time frame."

John Corbett
IT Manager
IRB

earning us a percentage of the sales through that site too.”

According to Kelly, the most impressive content was the live updates with running statistics during games. This “match-tracker” provided commentary in three languages, updated every 20 seconds. Combined with an archive of statistics from the tournament database, this kept hard-core fans up to date with the rugby action.

Says Kelly: “People who couldn’t get to a TV screen could stay tuned to the game through our Web site. Many of the games were played about 8pm Sydney time, which is 10am in London. I’m sure we gave a lot of people stuck in offices throughout Europe and the UK a real sense of the game through the text commentary.

“And, if you were a supporter of a particular team, you could go into that country’s section and find all the news.”

Intelligence-Gathering for Sponsors

The support of the IRB’s commercial partners was vital to the tournament’s success. They provide a large amount of income that the IRB invests in developing

rugby around the world. The IRB wanted to ensure these sponsors were catered for through the site with their own sections.

It also wanted to retain enough business intelligence from site usage to be able to show sponsors, and potential sponsors and advertisers, how the site was used.

“We need to prove that ‘x’ number of people visited this part of the site on this day, as well as other useful information about how people use a Web site,” says Kelly. “This helps us mount a case for why sponsors should be part of our tournaments. We had a business intelligence tool attached to the site that provided this information, which will be very useful now.”

The next IRB tournaments are the Under 19 World Championships, which will be held in South Africa in March and April 2004, and the Under 21 World Championships, to be held in Scotland in June 2004. The Microsoft and Unisys technologies that proved so successful for the RWC 2003 will be used again at these tournaments.



Software and Services

Microsoft® Windows® 2000
(English, French and Spanish)
Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000
Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003
Microsoft Content Management
Server 2002
Microsoft Operations Manager
2000

Hardware

Nine Dell PowerEdge 2650 servers
20 Dell Optiplex Pentium 4 desktop
PCs
Two Dell Latitude Pentium 2
notebooks

Partners

Unisys
<http://www.unisys.com/>

Microsoft Consulting Services
<http://www.microsoft.com/>

Devtest
<http://www.devtest.com/>

Compuware
<http://www.compuware.com.au/>

Software for the Agile Business

For More Information

For more information in Australia, call the Microsoft Information Centre on 13 20 58. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:
<http://www.microsoft.com/resources/casestudies/>

For more information about the International Rugby Board call 00 353 1 240 9200 or visit the Web site at: <http://www.irb.com/>

For more information about Unisys services call 1300 655 640 or visit the Web site at: <http://www.unisys.com/>

For more information about Devtest services call 61 3 9826 1499 or visit the Web site at: <http://www.devtest.com/>

For more information about Compuware services call 1800 675-720 or visit the Web site at: <http://www.compuware.com.au/>

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