



Case study

Industry sector:
broadcast and media

Non-stop video and audio programming direct to desktops

MLB Advanced Media increases its global audience with 24/7 online US baseball coverage using BT Managed Mediastream

“Major League Baseball sports fans are the most loyal and fervent in the world. They expect MLB Advanced Media to keep them updated on their favourite baseball team, no matter where they are. Thanks to our relationship with BT they are only a click away from the ballpark and all 2,430 MLB games.”

Joe Choti
CTO
MLB Advanced Media LP

Executive summary

The official league web site and leading provider of the most complete baseball information online, Major League Baseball Advanced Media LP (MLBAM) – the interactive media and internet division of Major League Baseball – features more live events than any other web site in the world.

MLBAM wanted to develop new market opportunities through the launch of an ‘All Access’ package, offering customers the opportunity to view or listen online to any game of their choice and sample exclusive video-on-demand features and highlights of all MLB crown jewel events. With less than 30 days to opening day, the company sought a partner to distribute live games over the internet, managing video direct from 15 games as well as 45 audio feeds from television and radio stations across the United States.

MLBAM has delivered its vision, leveraging BT’s experience in bringing live sporting events to a worldwide audience. BT’s extensive global satellite infrastructure and proven webcast encoding and delivery capability – BT Mediastream – ensures around the clock, uninterrupted high quality video and audio programming to MLBAM’s growing worldwide customer base of over 10 million registered users.

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CTO
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Marketplace

Major League Baseball Advanced Media LP (MLBAM) is the interactive media and internet division of Major League Baseball. It was established in June 2000, following a decision by the 30 MLB club owners to centralise baseball’s internet operations.

MLBAM manages the official league web site – www.MLB.com – as well as each of the 30 individual team web sites. MLB.com offers fans the most complete baseball information on the internet, including live and archived video webcasts of entire games, game summaries, pitch-by-pitch recaps, hosted post-game video highlights, up-to-date player and team statistics, extensive historical information, and exclusive features about events and programmes.

In 2004, with 10 million registered users and 800,000 paying customers, MLB.com featured more live events on the internet than any other web site in the world – as fans listened and watched nearly 600 million minutes of streaming audio and video – and significantly contributed to the company’s revenues of \$130 million.

Business opportunity

Building on its market leadership, and to encourage the widest and most consistent online audience possible, MLBAM wanted to launch a new ‘All Access’ package that would afford fans the opportunity to view or listen online to any game of their choice – selecting from 162 games per team and including exclusive video-on-demand features.

The challenges in bringing this offer to market were significant. MLBAM required a partner with the experience, expertise and facilities to capture and encode live video footage and distribute it over the internet for an entire MLB season – a total of 2,430 games. In addition there would be hundreds of press conferences, exhibition games, spring training games and other MLB crown jewel events. The chosen partner would need to be able to simultaneously manage video from 15 games and 45 audio feeds from television and radio stations across the United States.

BT solution

MLBAM invited proposals from several service providers including BT. Drawing on over 40 years experience in bringing live sporting events to a global audience, BT Media and Broadcast was able to develop a solution to meet the company’s requirements in full. That solution used BT Mediastream, which is based on the company’s extensive global satellite and fibre infrastructure to provide an enterprise grade webcast encoding and delivery platform.

BT was able to pass on the benefits of its strong relationships with broadcasters and commercial satellite owners, enabling MLBAM to acquire each game efficiently and cost effectively. BT’s solid working relationship with Akamai – MLBAM’s partner for content distribution – helped to seal the deal, and BT Media and Broadcast was awarded the contract to manage the acquisition, network service and delivery of online US baseball video and audio programming.

With less than 30 days to the opening day and a challenging list of criteria to be achieved, the BT solution had to be delivered in record time. BT first set out to define the implementation team, map out the acquisition points, obtain the required Integrated Receiver Decoder (IRD) authorisations, and set up the base band – which defines how video is routed from antenna to encoder.

Next the team expanded the existing BT encoding platform, installed the video capture cards – which convert the video signal to a compressed format – and put together the hardware and software. Lastly, BT rigorously tested the infrastructure and equipment, set up the monitoring process, and mapped out the interface routes with Akamai.

To acquire the audio feeds, BT Media and Broadcast brought in BT Conferencing. Each radio broadcaster has a coupler that allows the acquisition of broadcast content. BT's conferencing platform technology software connects to the coupler and sends the content directly to Akamai for distribution over the internet.

Quality of service and redundancy is assured through the use of SDI (Serial Digital Interface) technology for quality video in/out, flexible back up routing and redundancy options should there be a technical outage. BT installed an additional routing path including satellite space to accommodate as many as 20 games simultaneously – exceeding MLB's original requirements for handling up to 15 feeds.

On the opening day of the MLB season – with the BT-provided platform in place, MLBAM launched its 'All Access' service to market as planned. Joe Choti, MLBAM's CTO, says: "Major League Baseball sports fans are the most loyal and fervent in the world. They expect MLB Advanced Media to keep them updated on their favourite baseball team, no matter where they are. Thanks to our relationship with BT they are only a click away from the ballpark and all 2,430 MLB games."

Why BT?

- BT's experience in bringing live sporting events to a global audience
- BT was able to leverage existing relationships with broadcasters and commercial satellite owners, enabling MLBAM to acquire efficient and cost effective coverage
- BT's extensive global satellite and fibre infrastructure – BT Mediastream – a proven enterprise grade webcast encoding and delivery platform
- BT's solid working relationship with other MLBAM partners such as Akamai

Results

MLBAM's new service has proven to be an instant hit. With over 300,000 subscribers registered for webcasts of live games, MLBAM has already doubled its number of customers. BT has helped MLBAM to expand its subscriber base and develop new revenue streams by widening access of the games to a worldwide audience, so that baseball fans – wherever they are located – are now able to see their favourite teams play.

With coverage previously limited and viewing restricted to customers with access to Real Player, the company has transformed its service and can now deliver 100 per cent of MLB games online to even more customers, with the users of Windows Media Player now also able to watch games. Wider access has made a positive business contribution, with over 200,000 downloads of individual games racked up so far compared to a total of 40,000 for all of 2003.

BT's managed service ensures around the clock uninterrupted high quality video and audio programming to PCs – with two full time booking people constantly updating the schedules and monitoring the activity, a team of five full time web streaming producers, and two engineers in Washington DC and Los Angeles. Even on the rare day when there is no game, the BT team continues to test the systems and back-up channels.

In addition to the production of every game, BT also manages the real time archiving of all content through its streaming media centre – uploading the compressed audio and video on a daily basis in order for MLBAM to provide end users with archived game content such as highlights footage and strike out coverage.

Joe Choti sums up: "We see technology as a key business enabler – in this instance enabling us to extend our market reach and optimise our value proposition. BT is a valued partner in this process, working around the clock to provide the broadcasting expertise and resilient delivery infrastructure to make this possible."

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Technology blueprint

BT downlinks the games from two main satellites, Galaxy 11 and AMC4 and acquires additional feeds if necessary from Vyvx's domestic fibre network. The content is sent via BT's global satellite and fibre network to BT's Marina Del Rey and Washington DC Media Centres and encoded using Windows Media Player and RealPlayer format at data rates of 350kbps at 320x240 pixels.

The encoded footage is then delivered, via BT's conferencing platform, to the Akamai content delivery network for distribution via the internet – using its edge delivery network to distribute the streams and overcome congestion and packet loss. By placing its own servers geographically closer to the end users, Akamai is able to concentrate on getting the optimum stream out to those servers.

Serial Digital Interface (SDI) technology provides quality video in/out, flexible back-up routing and redundancy options should there be a technical outage or MLBAM's requirements change. Redundancy is enhanced further with an additional routing path including satellite space to accommodate as many as 20 games simultaneously.

Main BT products & services

- BT Mediastream
- BT Conferencing
- Managed Service



Offices worldwide

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