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The Olympic IT Challenge for Businesses

Overcoming the Impending
Network Challenges of the
World's Largest Online Event

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It's 2012 and the Olympics are all but upon us – which is a good thing for sports fans all over the world, but perhaps not so good for businesses and their IT departments. Work will have to continue for businesses and public sector institutions under what will feel like unprecedented circumstances, particularly in London. This goes well beyond specific street closures and extends into network latencies and likely Internet closures.

Think about any major event over the last few years and you'll probably agree Internet connections have been pretty robust. You could go online more or less at will. There have been exceptions – as recently as June this year one leading ISP had an outage that put much of London and the South East offline briefly. The 2012 Summer Olympic Games and the demands it will be placing upon the network backbone of London is not like past events. Its sheer scale and its growing dependency on Internet data distribution could bring the Internet to its knees in the UK, and take thousands of businesses along with it.

The Anticipated IT Issues

The London Olympics may in fact introduce that sort of systemic Internet slow down and even outages to an uncomfortable amount of businesses and their customers. Consider the physical scope of the event and how these groups will be utilizing the Internet without rest for professional and personal reasons:

- 636 competitive events across 37 venues
- 14,700 athletes and their supporting teams
- 200,000 staffers of the event
- 20,000 broadcasters, photographers an journalists
- 23,500 police and security troops
- 350,000 tourists/ticket holders a day are anticipated

Alone, the sheer volume of people flooding into London and relying upon the Internet poses unique and daunting logistical challenges. Compound this with the fact the 2012 games is projected to be the largest global online event to date, and inbound and outbound data will inundate the network infrastructure of London. To put things into perspective, these basic numbers are enough to raise eyebrows and concerns for businesses that depend upon Internet for revenue and day-to-day operations:

- 8.5 billion mobiles, laptops and tablets in the world
- 4 billion viewers globally
- 24x7 television broadcast in addition to HD and 3D broadcasts
- 3,000 hours of live streaming Youtube coverage

The event's scale only truly sinks in when some of these figures, sourced from the Government's own documentation along with other sources, are taken into account. Moving people between venues is clearly a substantial issue, as are the logistics. The Government is also warning about moving data within London, into London and out of London.

Consider the impact on IT systems when there is a major sporting event occurring. Suppose Andy Murray gets to the final of Wimbledon. The Internet starts to slow down, just as it used to in the late 1990s when America woke up in the afternoons – there will be inevitable bandwidth issues.

Now consider 636 world-class competitive events taking place across the Olympic sites and all of the people attending, broadcasting, securing and working the events. All of the data they create, consume and share – texts, emails, tweets, photos, videos, blogs, network broadcasts articles, podcasts, live streaming, Google mapping, etc. – will be funnelling through the limited capacity of London's network backbone.

The Threatened Business Opportunity

This limited bandwidth capacity is why the Cabinet Office has issued warnings of Internet slow-downs and outages. Businesses and organizations that rely upon the Internet may not be able to do so, unless they take proactive measures to circumvent the forthcoming issues. Revenue generating sites – ticket brokers, hotels, restaurants, eCommerce – will not be the only ones affected. Organisations that rely on the Internet for email, collaboration, training, customer support, lead generation, recruiting and back office applications will also suffer.

Businesses within the UK or who have customers within the UK will need their systems to work reliably, every time and without question. The Government's own warnings suggest this may not happen unless businesses and organizations take some sort of action. This is not scaremongering; this is simple practical advice from an independent source.

In recent weeks we have seen system difficulties from RBS and its daughter banks; these were big enough to hit the headlines. Consider a system outage that affected London or even all of the UK – and what businesses can do to ensure they are not caught in an Olympic-generated network incident.

Preparing Your IT Infrastructure

The Government is advising employees to turn off bandwidth-hungry applications like video streaming. In principle this works but it is impractical and only a minimal measure for battling a massive issue. People will continue to use the Internet as they always have until the Internet slows or stops. They will watch and share videos, take and send pictures with their mobiles, teleconference and post on Facebook while on the tube.

Perhaps most interestingly and alarmingly, Whitehall is also suggesting businesses should upgrade their network capacity. It is at this point that a number of elements become important. Upgrading may involve changing ISPs. This is can be done, but businesses need critical information about the ISP to which they are moving. Some examples would include:

- **Location of The Servers' Data Centre**
  If London is expected to have major Internet congestion issues then it makes no sense to opt for an ISP whose infrastructure is physically located there. It is equally unwise to look for someone whose servers are too far away from your end users, as network performance can be impacted by the distance between them and your servers. PEER 1 Hosting falls into neither of these categories as it has its own data centre just outside of London in Portsmouth. Not only is it close to the city, its immediate proximity to a transatlantic link ensures that network inbound and outbound data speeds are not interrupted by data traffic within London proper.

- **Service Expertise Across Hosting Platforms**
The geographic location of your servers is only part of the hosting equation to circumvent London network issues during the Olympics. Another key factor is the expertise the hosting provider brings to the table. Geographic convenience to the city means little if they cannot provide the knowledge, experience and a successful track record of migrating, deploying and managing your infrastructure – whether it's managed, dedicated, cloud/virtualisation or collocated. And FirstCall Support™ promises that your support needs are not fielded by call centres or gatekeepers, but by people who can begin solving your issue immediately.

- **Fast and Resilient Network**
Most ISPs (Internet Service Providers) and Telcomms are still based on copper network backbone that cannot be expected to handle the massive data influx to be generated by the London Games where so much emphasis is being placed on video, live streaming, HD broadcasting and 3-D broadcasting. This is why PEER 1 Hosting's FastFiber Network™ and its 15,000 miles of wholly owned, managed and monitored Fibre-optics, is essential to uptime and speed. It is designed so that business-critical traffic can be routed around network latencies and stoppages.

- **SLAs That Protect Businesses**
Service Level Agreements guarantee a hosting provider's performance level across various business-critical services such as uptime and hardware replacement time. There is no such thing as perfection, but businesses need to be certain they will be compensated fairly and quickly if the SLA is compromised. Read the small print and understand the compensation structure of the SLAs. PEER 1 Hosting stands behind clear, concise and fair SLAs that set a high standard for our people and your expectations.

- **Dedicated Technical Account Manager (TAM)**
An excellent service provider will offer a Technical Account Manager (TAM) for customers with more complex installations. This means that customers with the most difficult technologies will have someone on hand with an in-depth knowledge of their set-up the whole time rather than a support executive who needs rebriefing every time someone needs further help.

- **Flexible and Open Contracts**
Too many service providers lock their customers in to a long term contract over a period of time that simply is not equitable. This is contrary to the way a business should operate; ideally a contract should work in both parties' interests rather than just the one, and be clear and easy to understand from both parties' points of view.

  Work with a hosting provider that can create a contract that reflects your business' and project's requirements so you don't over- or under-buy computing resources

- **Green Credentials**
Making a smart business decision does not have to come at an environmental cost. Like wise, making a smart environmental decision does not have to come at a business cost. This is why our Portsmouth Data Centre, the greenest data facility of its kind in the UK, is important. It offers minimal energy consumption to keep the costs down alongside intelligent pricing plans, plus built-in redundancy so in the unlikely event there's a problem there is automatic failover.

Having the right robust infrastructure, support and hosting partner in place will continue to pay forward well after the Olympics have been and gone.

Meeting the Olympic challenge

PEER 1 Hosting has prioritised getting businesses through the Olympics' IT challenges as painlessly as possible. We are fully aware that we are responsible for business infrastructures on which businesses and people's livelihoods depend. Just as important, we do not underestimate the stresses the Games will put on London's networks. Our offerings are walled-in to ensure they are insulated from the worst of those stresses; they are contractually as well as technically robust and we have exactly the right people in place to support them.

The Olympics can be a great opportunity for businesses that are online, or it could be a substantial bust. But beyond the businesses depending on Olympic-generated revenue, any business that depends on the Internet within London and the UK could become collateral damage when the networks slow or come to a standstill.

Remove the looming risk. Talk to your ISP or hosting provider. Find out what their plans are to protect your business and revenue during the Olympics. Then come to our 2012 Olympic Team with your hardest questions and most difficult needs. We are confident that we'll have the solutions, the expertise and the delivery you can't find anywhere else.

Keep Your Sites and Apps Online During the 2012 Summer Games