

The United Center Chooses IntelliFlash™ for its Video Experience



The United Center, home to the Chicago Blackhawks and Chicago Bulls, is one of the largest arenas in the United States. Since its opening in 1994, it has hosted over 40 million guests and 4,000 events, including NBA Finals, NHL Stanley Cup Finals, the 1996 Democratic

National Convention, and countless top music artists such as The Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, U2, and Bruce Springsteen. The United Center, home to the Chicago Blackhawks and Chicago Bulls, is one of the largest arenas in the United States. Since its opening in 1994, it has hosted over 40 million guests and 4,000 events, including NBA Finals, NHL Stanley Cup Finals, the 1996 Democratic National Convention, and countless top music artists such as The Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, U2, and Bruce Springsteen.

Challenges

The United Center's storage solution was extremely unreliable, adversely impacting the productivity of the arena's video team and the overall fan experience

Solution

IntelliFlash HD-Series storage system

Results

- Ability to work with video files in real-time from "vault"
- Hands-off maintenance
- 30 percent data reduction

The Challenge: Delivering SaaS Performance

When people think about the Chicago Bulls or Chicago Blackhawks, data storage is probably not the first thing that comes to their minds. What most people don't realize is that storage systems power a key aspect of the in-person fan experience: the video scoreboard.

"Video actually adds a tremendous amount to the fan experience – the scoreboard is a great tool to rally our fans, whether that's showing a replay, providing past highlights of players, or making sure everyone enjoys the halftime entertainment," says Rob Sheppard, Data Center Manager at the United Center. "I like to call our video production team the unsung heroes of this place. For a venue that is almost a million square feet, with 23,000 seats, video is absolutely crucial for the ultimate sports experience."

However, running a world-class video experience requires more than just a great team: it also needs top notch equipment. Unfortunately for the United Center, its storage system just wasn't cutting it.

"Our [existing storage solution] was terrible – a pain in my rear from day one. It was implemented before my time. People didn't like it then, and I certainly didn't like it when I took over," said Sheppard. "The only predictable thing about it was that it was unreliable." Network shares would disappear randomly, the system would drop offline regularly for minutes, and it was slow. When you're working to entertain an audience in real-time, things like this can't be happening."

The Solution: Tintri IntelliFlash HD Series

Sheppard knew that the solution was unsustainable and made it a priority early on that the "vault" – the array where they stored all the raw video files – needed to be replaced. "It was just a question of time and budget," he said. He began his search by casting a wide net.

"In the beginning, we talked to a number of vendors," said Sheppard. "We had very demanding requirements. It turns out when you need a single volume that is easily expandable, with tons of space, just one file system, and with extremely quick speeds – all without busting your budget – you can narrow things down pretty quickly."

IntelliFlash's value, performance and reputation represented a clear choice for United Center – especially the IntelliFlash HD-Series. "When we first started the process, we wanted an all-flash array so that our production team could work and edit videos in real time, as opposed to having to copy files to their own drives. However, we thought there was no way we could get that since AFAs are typically very expensive," said Sheppard. "IntelliFlash blew us away with its speed and economics. We looked at a few others, but they didn't even come close. And we already had a very positive experience with the hybrid arrays, so it was a no brainer."

Tintri's IntelliFlash HD-Series is fully redundant, with no single point of failure, and deliver unprecedented levels of performance, data consolidation, simplicity, and economics. All media are dual-ported and accessible through a pair of active/active controllers. Users can take instantaneous and space-efficient snapshots that can be replicated for disaster recovery purposes locally, remotely, or to the public cloud or any S3-compliant object storage through



the IntelliFlash S3 Cloud Connector. The inline compression and deduplication on SSDs and HDDs within the systems significantly reduce storage acquisition costs. Redundant virtual server operating system images as well as hundreds or thousands of persistent VDI instances are reduced to a single flash-based storage instance that can launch in seconds.

The Result: Happy Customers and Fans

The difference in results and experience has been night and day for Sheppard and his team. "With the [previous solution], I had to replace a hard drive every other day. It required constant care and feeding. Now, it's been months since I've even checked in on our array," said Sheppard. "If there ever is an issue, Tegile's [now Tintri's] support team is always right there to walk me through whatever I need."

Sheppard is now getting impressive results, and consequently has one happy video team. "We're getting a 30 percent data reduction rate, which is very impressive considering we're working entirely with unstructured data that is already compressed with all the various codecs our teams work with," he said. "And the array is fast. Our video editors can work directly out of the vault if they want, although old habits die hard."

Beyond speed and economics, Sheppard was also thrilled by the quality of IntelliFlash's snapshot feature. "It's saved our hide quite a few times – nothing is worse than accidentally deleting footage that you need."

In the end, the decision to go with IntelliFlash HD-Series to power the United Center scoreboard has been a game changer. "I can tell you just by the smile factor, the video team is really happy that we switched over."

Experience different! For more information on how IntelliFlash can turbo-charge your business success through a simple, intelligent infrastructure, visit tintri.com/intelliflash.

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