Dimension Data Aligns Technology Solutions for A.S.O.'s Tour de France Becoming Lighter, Faster, and More Agile

July 20, 2017

By: Leslie Rosenberg

IDC's Quick Take

Dimension Data, a global IT provider based in South Africa, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of NTT Data, is the main technology sponsor of A.S.O.'s Tour de France, the premier bicycling event in the world for the third year in a multiyear relationship. In addition, Dimension Data also sponsors Team Dimension Data for Qhubeka, the first African cycling team to participate in the event.

Event Highlights

The 2017 Tour de France, taking place July 1-23, is considered one of cycling's premier events. This is the 104th running of the 3,540km race winding throughout France's scenic cities, countryside, and mountains, pushing 22 teams and 198 riders to persevere across terrain, weather, and competitive cycling conditions.

The ride is grueling, changing locations and conditions daily and moving at speed. The technology requirements need to match the speed of the riders and the complexity of the logistics and provide the fans with an exceptional real-time multichannel viewing experience. This was the challenge brought to Dimension Data by client Amaury Sports Organisation (A.S.O.), the owner of the Tour de France.

When Dimension Data commenced this project 2.5 years ago, it designed a state of the art solution by building a mobile datacenter truck that travels with the race, collecting data from the cyclists who had custom designed sensors attached to their bicycles. The data was transmitted to a team of planes and helicopters that followed the race, returning the data to the truck to be sanitized and then via fibre provided the data to media partners and team coaches for broadcast, social media, and team strategy. This approach was innovative and cutting edge, as nothing like this had been tried before.

Moving into 2016 Tour de France, Dimension Data along with A.S.O. worked to streamline the technology and processes to allow for more analytics and provide faster insight to their partners while enriching the viewing and participation experience for their fans. Dimension Data reduced the internal "footprint" of the datacenter truck by leveraging hyperconverged infrastructures, thereby reducing power and cooling and achieving the same quality of data processing and intelligence, which was coupled with Dimension Data's cloud. Replicating the data in the Dimension Data cloud allowed developers across the globe to make 24/7 adjustments to algorithms to provide better intelligence and insight.

By 2017, the architecture once again evolved and became more agile and streamlined. The datacenter aspect of the truck was moved to the cloud, sensors on the bicycles were enhanced, and connectivity between cyclists, helicopters, and the data truck were accelerated. The "on prem" truck resided at a finish line as a "command center" fitted out with monitors, video conferencing technology, switches, and security appliances, but without much of the hardware of previous years. The data from the sensors

on the bicycles is sent via Dimension Data's managed enterprise network services to Dimension Data's managed cloud platform and communications centers, where the data is cleansed and enhanced with automated algorithms and supplemental weather and geospatial data, which is then shared with other technology partners. The team on-site can more easily monitor the data for anomalies and adjust quickly, thereby focusing on providing the best experience possible. While this movement of data seems quite complicated, this process is replicated every second producing close to real time data to fans and commentators.

Moving forward, A.S.O. and Dimension Data are looking to continue to enhance the machine learning (ML) and predictive analytics capabilities it has developed. Working to train the machines for patterns and behaviors leveraging five years of race history plus learning from the past two years, it has been managing the data for A.S.O. This intelligence is paired with other rider data such as rider skills (climber, sprinter, attacker, etc.) and performance history. The output will hopefully provide a richer more in-depth set of insights for fans and coaches. While A.S.O. is the sole owner of the data produced during the race, Dimension Data owns the IP, which can replicate for other use cases in enterprise and sport.

IDC's Point of View

The Tour de France demonstrates a unique use case study for providing nimble, fast, and intelligent technology. The Tour de France is unique as a sporting event in that it changes locations daily, versus other popular sporting events that are stadium based. Intelligence and data are not new to sporting events; they are quite rich in American and European football, track and field, and auto-racing. The challenge presented a unique coupling of dynamics – terrain, weather, logistics, quantity of athletes, and connectivity – which were all solved elegantly by this evolving solution leveraging a combination of Dimension Data's cloud, managed network, datacenter, and collaboration services; a newly developed platform for machine learning and analytics and a global team of resources that allow for agile development producing insights and a robust fan experience regardless of the medium.

Dimension Data has already applied learnings from the Tour de France solution in wildlife conservation and security operations management. IDC believes Dimension Data can also present this use case for military and disaster relief (smarter cities?) as well as other outdoor venue events where real-time data and analytics are critical. The next iteration for Dimension Data will be to work with A.S.O. to help them develop new revenue streams or business models for future brand extension and fan expansion. The demonstration of the ongoing evolution to simplify, streamline, and extract value from the data illustrates a collaboration and partnership between Dimension Data and A.S.O. to help change the fan experience. IDC believes that this solution will continue to evolve becoming faster and smarter, which can easily be leveraged for other interesting IoT use cases for enterprise customers.

Subscriptions Covered:

Infrastructure Services: Transforming the Datacenter, Internet of Things: Services, Network Life-Cycle Services

#lcUS42895217