If you love great sport, step this way.
On August 1 2013, one of the most anticipated broadcasting ventures in the world of sport was launched by a telecoms company—BT. BT’s new offering is a full multi-platform, premium, broadband-based TV channel available on a wide range of devices—from set top boxes to smartphones—free for BT broadband subscribers. TV is now as much about broadband as it is about TV, and what were once localised experiments have given way to large-scale disruption. BT Sport is leading the way.

Business background

BT is long established as one of the UK’s largest telecom providers, and is in the vanguards of delivering high-speed fibre across the UK. A key strategy for its retail business has been expansion into the television market. BT has a clear understanding that the consumer it now serves has substantially changed from even just a few years ago. In the digital era, the consumer feels more empowered, both in terms of what they expect to consume and how they choose to consume it. They have high expectations; with instant access to the content they want, when they want it, on their device of choice very much to the fore. BT’s new service—BT Sport—aims squarely at meeting those demands. BT has acquired the rights to the live broadcast of 38 Barclays Premier League games each season from 2013 to 2016, along with Aviva Premiership Rugby, WTA and MotoGP from 2014—augmented with BT’s own produced content.

BT Sport is offered as a free service via BT TV and the web to BT’s seven million broadband customers and Virgin Media XL customers, as well as being available on a subscription basis through both Sky set top boxes (or free if a BT Broadband customer). On web and mobile, BT will augment its broadcasts with interactive programming, information and news that together create the compelling and immersive experience that digital consumers now expect. That rich content will help BT Sport compete in an increasingly tough game and achieve its stated goal of expanding its broadband base. In short, BT Sport is a premium sports channel without the need for a premium TV subscription.

Business challenge

Delivering a complex, multi-platform, live streaming and video-on-demand digital service—to an immovable deadline—is a complex and challenging proposition. Competition for the digital consumer has reached a new level of intensity. Accenture’s research demonstrates that today’s digital consumer is willing to pay for premium content, but they expect everything about a service to be on their terms, meeting their precise needs. With ‘super premium’ content such as live sport on the top of many wish lists, it’s no surprise that BT has chosen Barclays Premier League football as a way to drive additional subscribers to its broadband and communications services. But realising the vision of a compelling multi-platform, digital service required finding a provider that could bring together a number of key capabilities—including live digital video broadcasting, end-to-end video-on-demand supply chain capabilities, mobile app development, and cloud services. In addition, the service provider selected would need to have in-depth industry specialism in the digital space, able to support a high quality service, with end-to-end capabilities from content encoding to service management and a demonstrated record delivering feature-rich digital services for a project that had a non-negotiable start date.
How Accenture helped

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The ability to drive and orchestrate a wide range of specialist capabilities was essential to support the development and realisation of BT’s vision to create a compelling multi-platform offering against the clock. Following a competitive pitch, BT selected Accenture because it offers integrated digital specialisms across the board using the following capabilities: Accenture Video Solution and Live Events & Sports with Cloud and Mobility Services. That not only meant that BT avoided the complex and risky challenge of having to manage multiple vendors, but also saved valuable management time that would have otherwise been committed to managing different suppliers. With all the relevant capabilities ‘under one roof’, Accenture was able to deliver an end-to-end solution from stream capture to playout, against a very tight timetable. Accenture was engaged in February and the service was launched in August 1, 2013 for the start of the new Barclays Premier League season.

Accenture’s Communications, Media and Tech industry practice is at the forefront of developments that are creating significant disruption for all businesses. Digital is no longer an add-on or complementary part of media businesses’ offerings; businesses are fast becoming fully digital. Accenture’s offerings in the digital space in particular enabled two critical components for BT Sport.

The first is Accenture Video Solution (AVS)—Accenture’s broadband television solution—that delivers a content-rich, high-quality user experience across devices. This innovative offering is a pre-integrated platform based on Accenture-owned software components.

The solution provides easy-to-use, integrated services to support interactive applications that are customised to meet BT Sport’s specific requirements. AVS also offers integrated content supply chain management to support the many different content types that make up the BT Sport digital experience. And because AVS is provided as a managed service, it enabled BT Sport to build its service rapidly and efficiently.

BT also makes use of AVS specialised managed services—Live Events & Sports. This provides multi-platform, live digital broadcast 24/7 at scale, including all the encoding and publishing of live streams. Accenture’s research and experience confirms that one of the major causes of frustration for digital consumers is poor quality streaming that breaks up or is subject to persistent buffering. Accenture’s Live Events & Sport has a reputation for providing reliable, adaptive and responsive services to maximise the quality of experience that consumers receive.

Two other key elements of BT Sport were addressed by Accenture’s Mobility and Cloud Services. Mobility enables the creation of highly interactive and engaging apps across platforms, for smartphones and tablets. This ability was essential to achieve BT’s goal of providing services that go beyond broadcast and give consumers access to information and interactivity that help meet their demands—from passively watching the action, to becoming active participants. Accenture research shows that consumers increasingly watch on one screen and use an additional device to enrich and add to their viewing experience. And that’s exactly what the BT Sport app has enabled BT’s customers to do. As one review put it: “it [the BT Sport app] presents plenty of opportunities to nestle down with your tablet and lose yourself in a world of sport. It’s a great start for the fledgling service and so far we’ve consumed more sports content though the app than we have through the TV.” The app also enables viewers with a tablet or phone and broadband to use Airplay™ to blast content to their TV.

The fourth key dimension that Accenture brought to the successful delivery of BT Sport is the Accenture Cloud Platform (ACP). BT’s ambitions for its new service mean that it needs to be able to achieve scale quickly and efficiently. With the channel being offered free to BT broadband subscribers, using ACP would allow BT to respond rapidly to changes in the demand profile to support the expected increase—especially useful when launching a new content proposition where usage is highly unpredictable. As word spreads and demand grows, BT has to ensure that it can meet consumer expectations quickly and efficiently. The service provides scalable computer capacity that allows BT Sport to scale capacity and services up and down in line with the size of football matches. This feature contributed to the project’s overall cost benefit. Through ACP, Accenture provided a fully-managed service for deploying and managing cloud infrastructure, on-demand, together with an integrated authentication solution and a platform using NTT and Windows Azure. ACP provided the client with an agile solution that helped ensure reduced deployment time—enabling the team to stand up the platform quickly and as a result, played a vital role in the project’s speed to market and Accenture’s ability to meet the implementation timeline.

AT A GLANCE
Accenture's integrated expertise and capabilities

Cloud Services

Digital Video Services
Accenture Video Solution,
Live Events & Sports

Mobility
High performance delivered

Accenture and BT have worked together to create a service that offers a wealth of content and a compelling user experience, from the very first kick of the ball at the start of the Barclays Premier League Football 2013/14 season.

BT Sport’s live coverage of the inaugural game drew 764,000 peak viewers and the BT Sport App passed a million downloads within two months of launch. Much of the UK is already equipped to watch BT Sport channels on their TVs—either via satellite, BT TV or Virgin Media. While many of them who have BT Broadband have also downloaded the App, there are hundreds of thousands of homes that watch BT Sport exclusively online. Delivered to a very tight timetable, BT Sport has already taken its place as a major player in the highly competitive arena of digital entertainment.

Accenture’s ability to integrate all the required capabilities, including Digital Video Services, Mobility and Cloud, and work in deep collaboration with BT underpinned the successful, on-time delivery of BT Sport. As Greg McCall, COO, Television & Content, of BT put it: “Given the complexities of launching a channel across a number of platforms, it was good to have a partner that could give us one less thing to worry about. Accenture brought delivery experts as well as the latest technology in digital video, live events, cloud and mobility. So not only did we have access to the innovation we needed to craft the solution but Accenture provided the predictability required to deliver to such an important and immovable launch date. Their ‘one team’ ethos was a major factor in our success.”

The television industry today is undergoing the same revolutionary changes that the music and print industries have already experienced. The dramatic developments taking place confirm that the much-discussed future of television has arrived. In fact, as Accenture’s Sef Tuma points out “What we’re seeing today—and BT Sport is a great example—is innovation not only in digital content and platforms but also in business models. It’s all about offering a compelling content proposition for consumers while driving growth and sustainability. Serving consumers in a way that aligns with their expectations for access to content is as decisive and irreversible a move as the 99p track was for music in the last decade.”

As faster fibre rolls out and increasingly becomes the standard for more and more consumers, the pace of digital evolution will accelerate. Accenture’s Communications, Media and Tech industry practice is at the forefront of all these industry developments and has a deep understanding of the large-scale disruptive technologies that are currently re-shaping the world of television and mobile.
About Accenture

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with approximately 275,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world’s most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. The company generated net revenues of US$28.6 billion for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 2013. Its home page is www.accenture.com.