The Palace of Versailles Goes Digital, Increasing Revenue and Enhancing Overall Visitor Experience

Executive Summary

CUSTOMER NAME
Palace of Versailles, France

INDUSTRY
Public Sector

BUSINESS CHALLENGES
- Attracting more visitors and encouraging them to explore new areas of the cultural site
- Enhancing visitors' experiences
- Increasing revenue

SOLUTIONS
- Cisco Wi-Fi network provides modern communications platform in a protected historical environment
- Digital Great Versailles program researches use of advanced technologies in cultural sites

BUSINESS RESULTS
- New sponsorships and investment opportunities with technology leaders
- Innovative multimedia guide lures more visitors and enhances experience
- A "laboratory" for designing and testing new services and tools

Advanced technologies, such as wireless networking, have great potential for enabling cultural sites to communicate more directly and imaginatively with the visiting public. At the Palace of Versailles, one of Europe's most treasured locations, technology is heightening the visitor experience and bringing history to life, not to mention increasing foot traffic and creating new revenue streams.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

Located 10.6 miles (17 kilometers) southwest of Paris, the Palace of Versailles is one of Europe's most popular cultural sites, attracting more than 10 million visitors each year. It has a unique place in France's national heritage because of its historical importance as a former royal residence and center of government, and because of its rich artistic and architectural assets. The Public Institute of the Palace of Versailles, formed in 1995, is responsible for managing, protecting, and enhancing the Versailles campus, which contains 120 buildings on 2,000 acres.

The Institute's biggest challenge was reducing the long queues that regularly form in popular areas of the palace, such as the Hall of Mirrors and the Royal Apartments. Top logistical goals, therefore, included improving traffic flows and encouraging visitors to explore different areas of the site. Important strategic objectives were to enhance visitors' experiences during their time at Versailles, to attract more visitors, and to increase revenue.

Cisco Systems

Prepared by
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In December 2004, the French government launched a major program called Great Versailles. The government is investing US$178 million (EURO€135 million) in this 17-year program, which involves extensive maintenance to the infrastructure of the buildings and grounds, and restoration of selected artworks and furnishings from the collection of 28,000 pieces.

Great Versailles offered an opportunity to introduce modern communications links that would help develop the palace's dual role as a "leisure" destination and a center for research. However, the curators and administrators would require external help because they had limited experience using technology. In addition, many features on the campus, including the 18th-century formal gardens, are protected by law and can not be disturbed, preventing the installation of wired links such as cable.

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Christine Albanel, president, Public Institute of the Palace of Versailles

SOLUTIONS

In January 2005, the Institute initiated discussions with the French Ministry of Culture and Communications about Versailles becoming a test center for new ways of using technology in the field of culture. Four months later, the Cisco® Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) made a number of themed presentations, such as the role of collaborative tools in the administration of the future, and the creation of a wireless-enabled intelligent environment to enhance cultural experiences.

The timely involvement of Cisco offered the Institute an opportunity to visualize what might be achieved by introducing innovative technologies to Versailles. IBSG began working with curators, administrators, and third-party consultants and organizations to explore a possible digital dimension to Great Versailles. By the third quarter of 2005, "Digital Great Versailles" had emerged, a new program that would develop and pilot innovative, technology-based services and tools that, if successful, could potentially be used not just at Versailles, but at cultural sites throughout France.

"Great Versailles, the most important restoration program since the creation of Versailles at the end of the 17th century, is about allowing an increasingly broad and diverse public to benefit from a richer experience," says Christine Albanel, president of the Public Institute of the Palace of Versailles. "Digital Great Versailles will play an essential role in achieving these goals, thanks to the new multimedia technologies."

A new international research center was scheduled to open on the campus in September 2005. It would be responsible for coordinating the first phase of Digital Great Versailles—generating ideas for suitable projects. Because the research center was located 2.2 miles (3.5 kilometers) away from the main palace, an urgent priority was to provide it with fast communications links to the Internet and to colleagues on other parts of the campus. Cisco proposed, donated, and

installed a wireless infrastructure that avoided disturbing the protected gardens at Versailles and cost about 50 times less than a wired network in this challenging environment.

Next, a team representing all departments at Versailles started to define a strategic plan for Digital Great Versailles. Working with the Ministry of Culture and Communications and partners like Cisco, the team explored several different topics in a series of workshops. The overall objective was to identify and then develop ideas for innovative tours—both real and virtual—of the palace and its grounds using technology. Cisco IBSG played an active role, participating in many of the workshops and finding presenters and examples of best practices from around the world. Cisco also gave technical and content-related input to the redesign of the palace's Website.

The deployment of a meshed Wi-Fi network on which to offer visitors a new type of guided tour was the first idea to be realized as a pilot project in phase two of Digital Great Versailles. Instead of audio guides, which are commonly used at cultural sites, the palace would offer multimedia content on personal digital assistants (PDAs).

It was decided to pilot the Wi-Fi multimedia guides in the Domain of Marie-Antoinette, the former queen's private estate at Versailles, which was scheduled to reopen to the public after restoration work on July 1, 2006. The content would be presented as if by Marie-Antoinette herself, to create a more personalized experience.

Intelligent functionality in the Cisco wireless infrastructure made it possible for the network to identify the location of visitors and to automatically push their devices to the appropriate content for that location. Visitors would also be given the choice of receiving the content on an iPod as a podcast from the palace's new Website. This would add another element to the pilot and help determine whether the PDA or podcast was the most effective approach, and why.

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BUSINESS RESULTS

The Palace of Versailles was the first cultural site in Europe to deploy rich-media content over a meshed Wi-Fi network with location-based functionality. This achievement has modernized the palace's image and provided visible signs of its innovative strategy. That, in turn, has created new sponsorship and investment opportunities because technology companies and other potential partners are excited by the opportunity to showcase their solutions in such a high-profile setting.

Staff at the Institute anticipate other commercial benefits, such as additional revenue from an expected increase in the number of visitors due to new tour options and technologies. The Wi-Fi pilot in the Domain of Marie-Antoinette has already helped reduce queues and improve the flow of visitors around the site by providing an appealing alternative to the palace's most popular and congested areas.

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Béatrix Saule, director of the research center and senior curator
Palace of Versailles

The Institute is also achieving its goal of improving visitors' experiences. Early feedback from questionnaires and face-to-face interviews has shown that visitors to the Domain of Marie-Antoinette like the Wi-Fi multimedia guides because they are easy to use and they give people freedom to enjoy the tour in their own way. Visitors particularly appreciate receiving the right information at the right time, without having to look for it.

The Wi-Fi pilot is the first project to come out of Digital Great Versailles, and it demonstrates one of the ways in which new technologies can make culture more accessible. The Public Institute of the Palace of Versailles will continue to obtain customer feedback on the Wi-Fi project, and it will use this feedback to help refine the multimedia guide and to help develop new ideas. The palace has effectively become a "laboratory" for researching the design and use of multimedia tools in the cultural environment.

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Cisco's involvement has also provided the research center at Versailles with a fast, secure, and scalable communications infrastructure that supports its role in the international research community. "The presence of technology in an 18th-century house is a matter of pride for us and an unexpected source of satisfaction for our guests," confirms Béatrix Saule, director of the research center and senior curator of the Palace of Versailles. "I hope that our partnership with Cisco will continue to be as creative in the future, both in terms of ideas and results."

Another important outcome of Digital Great Versailles is that it allows the palace to use advanced technologies to show French citizens, and interested parties around the world, how the campus will look when the Great Versailles program is completed.

NEXT STEPS

The Institute is currently reorganizing the ticketing system for Versailles. Acting on the recommendation of IBSG, the Institute will connect the new system to the online registration service that is now provided on the redesigned Website. This integrated approach will be more flexible because it allows visitors to change their original bookings quickly and easily by, for example, requesting additional tickets or tours online.

Phase three of Digital Great Versailles has now begun and will involve developing a financial model for delivering new services, such as the Wi-Fi guide, on a commercial basis. Staff at the Public Institute of the Palace of Versailles will also share the work that has been done to date, and future projects, with other cultural sites throughout France, providing best-practice information and guidance on how to design and implement technology-based services.

MORE INFORMATION

The Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG), the global strategic consulting arm of Cisco, helps Global Fortune 500 companies and public organizations transform the way they do business—first designing innovative business processes and then by integrating advanced technologies into visionary roadmaps that improve customer experience and revenue growth.

For further information about IBSG, visit **http://www.cisco.com/go/ibsg**

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