

SECURE WI-FI IS PLAIN SAILING FOR TALL SHIPS REGATTA



Tall Ships regattas have been held around the world for more than 60 years to celebrate some of the finest sea-going sailing vessels ever built, and the racing skill of their crews. In the summer of 2016, the North Sea Tall Ships Regatta was held in Blyth in the county of Northumberland. Northumberland County Council (NCC) jointly organised the event with Tall Ships, with the aim of attracting large numbers of visitors to the region over the busy August Bank Holiday weekend.

Situated in the far northeast of England, near to the border with Scotland, Blyth is a busy trading port more commonly associated with container ships. With around 150,000 visitors expected to descend upon the town over the four-day festival, NCC was keen to ensure that entertainment and activities for the public to enjoy were complemented by easy access to the internet via Wi-Fi connectivity. This, in turn, would support the multi-faceted social media marketing and communications strategy developed to drive public interest and participation in the event.

The previous year, NCC had worked with specialist reseller partner KBR on a street-level public access Wi-Fi trial in selected parts of Blyth town centre. The trial involved several Fortinet wireless access points (APs) to provide next-generation Wi-Fi capabilities, and this was later replicated in other Northumbrian towns. The rapid deployment, ease of management and strong user performance experienced during the initial Blyth Wi-Fi project showed what was possible on a larger scale for the Tall Ships project. Achieving this would require extending the infrastructure over a far greater area of the town, and implementing appropriate security measures to safeguard all Wi-Fi users.

The fundamental challenge for the Tall Ships event was to serve a large, but ultimately unknown, amount of connections reliably and securely. NCC was concerned that the integrity of the event and the town should not be compromised by any inappropriate usage of the network (such as access to offensive websites) or service failure.

“Fortinet infrastructure has played a vital role in the success of our Tall Ships Wi-Fi project and provided us with a valuable template for future secure wireless projects in the county.”

– Dave McDonnell
Network and Communications
Manager at Northumberland County
Council

DETAILS

CUSTOMER: North Sea Tall Ships
Regatta, Blyth

INDUSTRY: Local Government

LOCATION: UK

BUSINESS IMPACT

- Delivered reliable, secure public Wi-Fi access for up to 500,000 users
- Enabled easy, rapid infrastructure deployment and ongoing management
- Provided comprehensive security protection and actionable threat intelligence to ensure continuity of service
- Safeguarded and positively impacted the reputations of Northumberland County Council, the town of Blyth, and a prestigious international sporting event

SPEED AND SECURITY ENSURES SMOOTH SAILING

The solution specified and implemented by KBR centred on the Fortinet OAP832e outdoor access point, chosen for its high performance, high density and ease of use in all weather conditions. A total of 58 of these 802.11ac compliant APs were strategically located to provide 6km of continuous wireless access stretching from the town centre to the docks, the Port of Blyth, Ridley Park and along the coastal promenade to the famous beach huts at Blyth South Beach. Working in tandem with a central controller, the Air Traffic Control™ operating system ensures the smoothest possible handoffs between each of the APs, with no channel interference.

As well as providing public Wi-Fi access, several of the APs were situated in the harbourside maintenance sheds reserved for the exclusive use of regatta crews and other sailing participants.

To safeguard users, a FortiGate-1500D high-end enterprise firewall was deployed at the aggregation point of the wireless network to deliver web filtering and other core security functions. Capable of up to 80Gbps of firewall throughput and 12 million concurrent sessions, and backed by the comprehensive threat intelligence of FortiGuard, the FortiGate-1500D is ideally scaled for large deployments of this kind. Its ability to implement unified policy management with a single pane of glass provided NCC with maximum real-time visibility and control over its security posture.

The North Sea Tall Ships Regatta exceeded expectations by attracting an estimated 500,000 visitors to Blyth, many of whom leveraged the fast, reliable public Wi-Fi access provided by NCC and enabled by KBR and Fortinet. The infrastructure provided a strong foundation for the successful execution of the event's social media 'buzz', with no service interruptions reported. The FortiGate-1500D successfully assured a safe and effective user experience.

With the event completed, much of the infrastructure will remain in place as a legacy for the town of Blyth, with some APs earmarked for reuse throughout the county. These could potentially include digital inclusion projects to encourage the uptake of technology services in socially deprived areas, and the extension of street-level public Wi-Fi projects beyond urban centres.

"We have enjoyed a positive relationship with KBR for over 13 years now, benefiting from solutions that are always fit-for-purpose, cutting edge and with exactly the features we need."
– Dave McDonnell, Network and Communications Manager at Northumberland County Council.



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