

Selecting an Internet Supplier for the Mixed Martial Arts World Expo

A Case Study



As related by Paul Paone,
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A critical element in today's trade show technology environment is dependable Internet access. Exhibitors demand this service to demonstrate online software, sign-up new customers, and stay in touch via email. Show management requires Internet connectivity to process on-site attendee registrations, publish live event news, and stay productive. For many shows, attendees are also starting to demand free WiFi access to use mobile apps, engage with social media, and stay connected via email. Unfortunately, procuring reliable Internet service can be a cost-prohibitive and frustrating experience for many show organizers.

A Problem for Show Organizers: Reliable Internet Connectivity

The challenge for a show organizer is to find a supplier who can deliver continuous Internet service at a reasonable price.

When the Internet goes down, attendee registration grinds to a halt, causing frustration for everyone involved. Spotty Internet coverage on the exhibit hall floor can create a nightmare scenario as unhappy exhibitors chase down the show organizer to complain, causing the organizer to relay this frustration to the service provider. This activity hopefully produces a fix, at least until the next outage, when the whole cycle starts over again.

In many cases, a lack of available alternatives creates added challenges. Many show organizers feel stuck in a no-win scenario with rising Internet costs straining the budget, increased WiFi connectivity demands from participants, and a de facto in-house supplier with minimal incentive to improve the quality of service.

One Show Organizer's Experience

In the case of Paul Paone, show organizer for the 3rd Annual Mixed Martial Arts World Expo (MMA), he remembered far too vividly the Internet problems he encountered during his previous shows. During the first two years he produced MMA at the Javits Center in New York City, Paone relied on the Internet services available from the facility. Complaints and issues with the service offering were loudly voiced by exhibitors and members of Paone's team. Many of the MMA exhibitors who attempted to process credit card orders at their booths reported that it was nearly impossible to conduct business due to slow or no Internet connectivity. Paone shares that "in 2009, the event was held over the weekend which meant there were no Internet technicians available to troubleshoot when the entire Internet service shut-down." The unreliable service created frustration all around.

Paone felt that for the amount of money paid, not only did he not receive a commensurate level of service, but it hurt his show's reputation because exhibitors were unable to process transactions. These exhibitors blamed Paone for the Internet issues.

The Decision Process

Determined to improve upon the status quo for his 2011 MMA show, Paone evaluated multiple suppliers who could satisfy his group's Internet connectivity needs. The show management registration area required Internet access for 3 computers. Paone was also responsible for procuring Internet access for 9 exhibitor booths. To ensure all users had adequate bandwidth to run online applications, Paone requested a speed range of 1 Mbps downstream / 512 Kbps upstream. Of note, Paone had no requirement to provide event-wide WiFi for attendees.

Paone was referred to Trade Show Internet (TSI) by another technology supplier. He learned about the company's service offerings for show organizers. Paone evaluated the company's TSI On-Site service but ultimately determined that TSI's Internet Kit rental solution provided the best value for his event. Paone appreciated the flexibility of the Internet Kit solution as it allowed him to create a hard-wired or wireless (WiFi) configuration at each location. Importantly, the supplier passed Paone's due diligence test with multiple positive client references from exhibitors and show organizers.

To ensure a good experience, TSI worked with Verizon Wireless's local network engineering team and performed a site survey to test the network prior to Paone's event. Realizing Paone's cost sensitivity, TSI offered flexible support options including sending a technician on-site and 24x7 telephone support – Paone ultimately chose the latter, but never needed to call.

For Paone, the ultimate deciding factor was cost. With TSI's 3G Internet Kit rental solution, Paone's group saved \$10,257 compared to a comparable service level offering from the Javits Center.

Javits Center's Cost

	Qty	Cost
Registration Area		
T1 Line	1	\$4,609
IP Address	2	\$204
8 Port Hub Rental	1	\$152
Exhibitor Booths		
EtherNet Line	9	\$9,882
Total		\$14,847

Trade Show Internet's Cost

	Qty	Cost
Registration Area		
3G Internet Kit	1	\$399
Exhibitor Booths		
3G Internet Kit	9	\$3,591
Round-trip Shipping	1	\$600
Total		\$4,590
Cost Savings: \$10,257		

The In-House Exclusivity Issue

A major consideration for Paone was whether MMA could legally use an outside supplier for Internet service at Javits, given his experience with facility "exclusives". Through conversations and documentation from TSI, Paone became aware of four federal laws which protect the rights of exhibitors and show organizers to select their own Internet service provider and operate their own Internet devices at events. Paone kept a copy of TSI's Consumer Bill of Rights with him at the event, though it was a non-issue.

The Results

Paone's decision to select TSI had dramatic results. Paone writes:

The 3rd Annual MMA World Expo in NYC featured several innovative technologies for its thousands of mixed martial arts fans and vendors. These new benefits would have been impossible to produce, however, without reliable Internet services. As with other large convention centers, shoddy and overpriced Internet service is considered standard, which is why we called on TSI. Without a hitch (and outlandish service fees), we were able to set up broadband Internet service at an incredible savings.

MMA successfully processed credit cards for attendee admission. Paone reported that all transactions from his registration team went smoothly. The exhibitors were able to conduct their business, whether it was selling a product or using the Internet to show prospects information online. For Paone, a remarkable feat was accomplished – not one exhibitor complained. Silence from his exhibitors was the ultimate hallmark of success.

For Paone, TSI provided intangible benefits that were hard to measure but still very real. By using TSI, Paone gained a sense of empowerment through his newfound freedom of choice. Rather than feeling held captive by the venue's in-house supplier, Paone was able to take advantage of market forces and competition to create viable new options for his organization.