AT&T Business

AT&T helps historic festival break free from paper payments

Business needs

Better ways to support purchases at a popular annual arts festival

Networking solution

AT&T Switched Ethernet Service with Network on Demand works through a dual-ended connection, enabling cashless transactions to enhance network reliability, streamline purchasing, and make it easy to decrease bandwidth between festivals.

Business value

Fast and secure transactions, simplified operations

Industry focus

Community arts festival

Size

70,000+ patrons

About the Red River Revel

Since 1976, the Red River Revel in Shreveport, Louisiana, has presented outstanding national and regional musical performances and showcased other performing arts, workshops, visual arts, creative experiences, seminars, and children's aesthetic education. It also operates the Cork Wine Festival, an upscale fundraiser for the Red River Revel. In addition, Shreveport Farmers' Market is the largest farmers' market in NWLA and was voted #1 in Louisiana.

The situation

For years, the Red River Revel sold paper coupons for festivalgoers to purchase food, beverages, and activities from festival vendors. When a new executive director introduced digital coupons in a pilot project designed to improve speed and efficiency, the festival's internet service proved slow and unreliable.

Solution

The Red River Revel upgraded to AT&T Switched Ethernet Service with Network on Demand, which delivers bandwidth that can handle payments rapidly, easily supporting the demands of tens of thousands of patrons.

A major cultural event

The Red River Revel has become a signature celebration in Shreveport, offering stellar national and regional musical performances, displays of visual arts, and plenty of creative and educational activities for children and adults. Logan Lewis, Red River Revel Executive Director, says the festival is a major regional cultural event.

"There are certain things that happen in any community that tell the story of who the people are and what they value. Here we have the Independence Bowl, Mud Bug Madness—our version of Mardi Gras—and the Red River Revel. They are sort of culture bearers for the community," he said.

"It gives creatives an outlet to practice their visual and performing arts and get paid, and it's an educational tool for our young people in the community," he said. "The Revel just completed our 48th year, so it has some staying power."

Streamlining sales

For decades, the Red River Revel conducted food sales with a paper coupon system that enabled festival officials to audit and track merchant sales correctly. "With so many different vendors doing food and beverage sales, it can be difficult," Lewis said.

Since the festival earns a percentage of vendor sales, accurately tracking the sales figures was vital. Instead of paying with cash or a card, festivalgoers purchased and used paper coupons. "Not to be pessimistic about human nature, but it would be easy for vendors not to report their total cash sales, which hurts our bottom line because we get a percentage of all sales. It also hurts our tax base because they have to pay state and local taxes," Lewis said.

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>
> Logan Lewis
> Executive Director, Red River Revel

Lewis's college sports sponsorship and marketing background demonstrated the value of contactless payment options. "When I got to the Revel, it seemed like the coupon process was antiquated," he said. He and the festival board of directors decided to introduce digital coupons that could be loaded onto RFID wristbands. The organization transitioned to the new system using paper coupons and wristbands for two years as people became accustomed to the new technology, eventually eliminating paper coupons.

"We saw wristband adoption rates growing, and the wristbands were so much easier to manage," he said. "We can get instant results on sales, and there's no need to count the coupons. Before introducing the wristbands, we had to count hundreds of thousands of coupons. We would spend weeks counting coupons to cut the final checks after the festival, and now we can do it the day after the festival is over because the numbers are instant."

In addition, the wristbands made it easy to return money for unused digital coupons. "That's been very successful and appreciated by our customers," Lewis said.

Problematic connectivity

Patrons pay cash to add money to their wristbands. They can quickly check their balance anytime, use the wristbands to pay admission fees, and make purchases at most festival booths. Officials were eager to simplify operations by eliminating the paper coupons but hesitated because of problems with the company that supplied the wristband connectivity.

The Revel's existing internet service was slow and not reliable enough to handle payments seamlessly. In addition, the organization experienced problems with its former internet provider. "We had issues during the festival of 2023. The server went down for five or six minutes, and we were without internet for about 10 minutes. That's not a very long time, but it was absolute panic with all those vendors in that setting. During the festival, it is critically important for us to maintain a solid connection," Lewis said.

"Our former provider was not as responsive or reliable at times, and we could never understand why we were having issues. This was something we wanted to address immediately." Lewis began researching speed and bandwidth options to handle tens of thousands of revelers at its events and the flexibility to decrease as necessary for day-to-day operations.

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Seamless connectivity

To complete its move to eliminate cash at its festivals, The Red River Revel team moved to AT&T Switched Ethernet with Network on Demand. The self-service, on-demand, intelligent networking solution is built on the AT&T reliable, high speed fiber network. It easily accommodates the festival business office with private networking and provides public internet access during festivals.

"As a part of going completely digital, we switched to AT&T in 2024. The AT&T fiber connection has proved pretty much flawless for our needs regarding speed, reliability, and providing the connection for all." Lewis uses the AT&T Control Center to scale, provision, and change network configurations rapidly, so the organization only pays for the bandwidth it uses.

The benefits of moving to AT&T were immediately apparent, he said. "Certainly, more bandwidth is a bonus and benefit to us. Our former provider doesn't have the bandwidth speed of AT&T fiber."

Dependability is another plus for Lewis. "During festivals, the network connects more than 100 devices that vendors use to make sales. I'm wasting money every second paying people to be here if I can't make sales, so reliability is critically important for our operations."

Richer data, better insights

Switching to AT&T Switched Ethernet had some unexpected benefits, Lewis said. "We found that people would put more money on the wristband, and they would hold a bigger balance than they would with coupons. They sometimes end up spending more because the transactions are faster."

Switching to digital coupons enabled festival staff to track the size of patrons' transactions more effectively.

"In the past, we really couldn't tell how much people on average were purchasing per load, but now, since it's all digital, we can slice this data in different ways and turn out some great insights that help us make decisions moving forward," he said.

The ability to turn down the bandwidth once the festival ends has been invaluable. "After the festival, we only have two staff members. The AT&T Switched Ethernet product is perfect for us because we can choose when we need more bandwidth and pay just for what we use."

"I think that that's a very uncommon business practice in 2024, and we're very appreciative of AT&T for offering that service to us. It has been exactly what we need and helps this little nonprofit continue to run in an efficient way," he said.

Speed, security, reliability

Lewis is happy with the relationship with his AT&T Business account team. "The personal touch helped me whenever I've had any questions or issues," he said. And he's equally impressed with the AT&T services. "When we know that our speed, security, and reliability are all going to be on deck, that allows us to take some chances in our technology that benefit the customer and the business and make us more efficient," he said.

For example, staff can close the books much more quickly. "We can get everything billed and pay our bills in a much faster time frame than ever before because when the festival is over, we can click a button and get a full report," he said.

"AT&T has allowed us to be a lot more efficient at the end of the year and turn the page towards next year. We're way ahead, and this technology has helped put us in that position," Lewis added. "It's not the only reason I think we're more efficient as a team, but I think it's a huge part of it."