

William Hill

jetNEXUS Improves Customer Experience. A Key Factor in the Massive Growth of William Hill's Online Business.

John Booton, IS Production Manager at William Hill



By using jetNEXUS web acceleration to accelerate its online betting service, William Hill has more than doubled its website capacity to over 12 million bets a year. Improved customer experience is the key factor in this spectacular growth, as this article explains.

Here's the Full Story

Before William Hill installed jetNEXUS web acceleration software on its servers, customers waited 25 seconds to download a football coupon on Saturday afternoon. Today, with jetNEXUS acceleration, it takes them just 6 seconds.

This transformation in the customer's experience of the site is thought to be one reason why William Hill has witnessed what it modestly calls "higher than anticipated customer recruitment." Its online Sportsbook and casino have shown a 77.5% increase in turnover, and those 12 million online bets have come from 150 countries, most being made over low bandwidth connections where delivery speed is a major issue.

Even more remarkably, acceleration of the William Hill site has been accomplished with relatively little expenditure on additional resources. jetNEXUS cut the bandwidth requirement by half on the day it was installed, and today it enables twice as much browsing and betting without any additional servers or extra bandwidth.

So how did it all come about? How did William Hill come to test and buy an acceleration solution that was only just emerging from development at the end of 2001?

"The impact of people coming in to place their bets and other people waiting for a response meant that transaction times were getting really slow, and this in turn was putting more strain on the servers. Fortunately for us, jetNEXUS has completely solved this problem."

John Booton, IS Production Manager at William Hill

First Steps

Unlike many companies with an online presence, William Hill has long had an acute awareness of performance issues. Two years ago it acquired a set of powerful Empirix test tools to simulate and measure the load on its web servers. It even built a complete replica of its web operation for benchmarking and testing.

Why go to these lengths? The answer is obvious when you examine the nature of its business. In sharp contrast to grocers, bookstores and other online enterprises, sports betting is extremely "peaky," with only moderate activity taking place during the week but explosive activity on Saturdays.

Even among Saturdays there are exceptional days when major horse races coincide with a full programme of Premiership football. To cater for demand, William Hill has had to construct a server farm that has the capacity to deliver pages and transactions at times when thousands of customers seek simultaneous access.

Having expanded its server farm to include 10 dual-processor servers running Microsoft IIS, William Hill analysed the requirement and concluded that web acceleration would still be needed to reduce bandwidth demand at peak periods. Technical Support Manager Alan Alderson explains:

"The impact of people coming in to place their bets and other people waiting for a response meant that transaction times were getting really slow, and this in turn was putting more strain on the servers. Fortunately for us, jetNEXUS has completely solved this problem."

Being new, jetNEXUS had not even been in the running when William Hill first considered acceleration. As Alan Alderson describes it in racing terms, "it came hurtling up on the rails" to win against two other competing systems from overseas.

"We spent a month to six weeks overall looking at web acceleration solutions, but it was only in the last week that the jetNEXUS Team came in to show us jetNEXUS. For us it was the obvious choice because it doesn't place a significant burden on the processor. Other systems do."

An Immediate Impact

IS Production Manager John Booton describes his first experience of watching jetNEXUS in action on the live site is "the electronic equivalent of seeing an elephant fly," so great was its impact on William Hill's server farm.

"Watching jetNEXUS in action on the live site is "the electronic equivalent of seeing an elephant fly," so great was its impact on William Hill's server farm."

John Booton, IS Production Manager at William Hill

jetNEXUS went onto the live servers on Friday December 7, 2001, and there was an immediate reduction in the bandwidth requirement by 50 percent. On the following day, a busy Saturday, the usual 8Mb requirement was cut to 4Mb.

Over the course of a year, traffic has built up as William Hill has increased its business, and it is now back to 8Mb on Saturdays -- but throughput has more than doubled.

"During the summer, the World Cup generated five times as much traffic for us as we had during the previous month," says Alan Alderson. "Without jetNEXUS we should have needed to add at least 5 or 6 more servers to cope with demand."

Experience Is All

Asked whether bandwidth saving or web acceleration is the most important benefit of jetNEXUS, Alderson says that ultimately the improvement in the customer's experience of the site is the real key to growth.

"If a customer can come onto the site, browse round it quickly and place his bet, he's more likely to stay on the William Hill site than go somewhere else."

One example of the improved customer experience is the new facility of being able to switch more quickly between pages.

"Until we installed jetNEXUS, customers were frustrated by not being able to change quickly from one coupon to another without waiting 15-20 seconds or more. Now they can quickly flick between coupons in just a couple of seconds. That's a huge improvement."

Taking the customer's viewpoint has been the key to William Hill's development of a successful online business.

"Technical staff in other companies have not always appreciated that server speed alone is not the only factor in achieving fast download times.

As Alderson confirms, "it's all about the last mile" -- squeezing data over the thin wire to the user at rate which is comfortably fast.

To reach the end user quickly, acceleration is an ideal solution. jetNEXUS shrinks data by up to 90 percent and ensures that it travels more quickly across the wire. The impact of acceleration is particularly noticeable over a 56K connection, the sort used by most home users. Only 20 percent of households in the UK had high-speed connections in Q4, 2004.

Summary

Rarely are users of information technology as enthusiastic about a product as William Hill is about jetNEXUS. Alan Alderson gives it "10 out of 10". "It's a fantastic product. It runs like a dream and it has given us no trouble, only benefits".

Alan Alderson gives jetNEXUS "10 out of 10". "It's a fantastic product. It runs like a dream and it has given us no trouble, only benefits".

Alan Alderson at William Hill

What is more, as John Booton says: "jetNEXUS has not depreciated the performance of our web servers. We've saved a substantial amount of money on communication costs and it will have paid for itself in under 12 months."

To these endorsements are added those of thousands of William Hill customers who keep returning to the site because they like it. jetNEXUS has played a vital role in improving their experience on what is surely one of the most customer-friendly operations on the Internet today.

N.B. All figures quoted in this document can be found in the Corporate Relations section at www.willhill.com.

Contact Us

Cedar Court,
Grove Business Park,
Waltham Road,
White Waltham,
Berkshire,
SL6 3LW

Tel: +44 (0) 870 382 5050
Fax: +44 (0) 870 382 5520

Email: info@jetnexus.com
Web: www.jetnexus.com