



Oldest Racecourse in the World Adopts Latest NFC Ticketing Technology and Digital Wallets

HID's Event Management Platform and Janam mobile computers transform the guest experience at Chester Racecourse with fast entry guaranteed

[King Henry VIII](#) is famously remembered for his tumultuous love life and six wives which led to the English Reformation and creation of the Church of England. Lesser known, however, is that during his reign in 1539, Chester Racecourse was founded. Recognized by [Guinness World Records](#) as the oldest racecourse still in operation, it's located a short walk from the city center. Operated by Chester Race Company, the venue is part of a diverse group that also manages two other racecourses - Bangor-on-Dee in Wales and Musselburgh in Scotland - along with a catering business, city center bar, hotel and recruitment business.

Chester Racecourse hosts 15 races a year on a distinctive one-mile track which features a short straight and tight, challenging turns. Annually, over 200,000 guests visit, with the Boodles May Festival featuring the Chester Cup the highlight of the racing calendar. Beyond racing, the racecourse operates year-round and is the largest conference and events facility in Chester, employing 150 full-time staff and expanding to 1,000 on race days.

HID SOLUTION

- HID Event Management Platform
- Janam XT3 rugged touch computers and scanners
- NFC ticketing
- Apple and Google Wallet support
- SeatGeek ticketing platform

CHALLENGES

Tickets for Chester Racecourse are sold via the official website or at the box office, utilizing a 'white labeled' platform from SeatGeek that simplifies ticket selection and purchase. Guests can choose from various ticket options including general admission, entrance to the main enclosures - The Roodee, Tattersall, and County Stands – or premium hospitality packages.

Historically, guests received an e-ticket (a PDF) via email which they'd either print at home or access via their phones on race day to retrieve a QR barcode which would then be scanned by stewards at multiple entrances.

This presented some unique challenges. "Poor mobile signal strength is an issue at the racecourse which is in a low-lying area so guests would struggle with connectivity and getting their tickets on their phones," explains Gareth Simpson, Head of Racecourse Operations. "At peak times, this impeded ingress and entrances could become very congested especially when crowds arrive on mass. If getting in on race day is slow or people can't actually find or download their tickets, it creates a negative experience."

Another problem was the integration between SeatGeek and HID's Event Management Platform (EMP) which manages all access control. A manual process was required to 'pull' tickets between the two systems. Tickets sold after a certain cut-off might not appear in the HID system, potentially barring some-one from entry. "If something was going to keep the IT team up at night, it was that," says Simpson.

In addition, access could be delayed as old ticket scanning devices were used which were slow, cumbersome and unreliable in low light conditions. They also required a connection to a Wi-Fi network which created other technical difficulties given some of the entrance gates are spread out and far from Wi-Fi access points. The legacy [wired] network also suffered from congestion under the load of thousands of guests, along with the other network traffic demands placed upon it like EPOS tills, CCTV and betting applications.

From an operational perspective, therefore, stewards would often have to wait for the network to respond which exacerbated the congestion issue, with binary responses only provided – the acceptance or not of a ticket – with no details as to 'why'. This hindered staff's ability to resolve issues efficiently and guide guests appropriately.

Furthermore, Chester Racecourse required a solution which would help it meet its compliance and insurance obligations as stands are regulated and have capacity limits – an issue ever more critical given forthcoming legislation such as Martyn's Law. "Chester Racecourse is classed as crowded place. Therefore, we need to do our utmost to make everything safe and secure so that people can forget about the day-to-day, enjoy their time with us and have an amazing experience," says Simpson. "Out of all the tickets sold, accurate, real-time visibility about who has actually entered and where they are is key to ensuring everyone's safety."

"NFC ticketing powered by HID's Event Management Platform and leveraging digital wallets has been transformational. In combination with Janam handsets, the overall solution is intuitive and simple for everyone to use and we've totally addressed all our guest entrance issues."

Gareth Simpson,
Head of Racecourse Operations,
Chester Race Company

SOLUTION

To overcome these challenges and enhance the guest experience, Chester Racecourse has implemented the latest Near Field Communications (NFC) ticketing technology, powered by HID's centralized cloud-based Event Management Platform (EMP). "Admissions are our first touch point with guests so to deliver an excellent guest experience, we want the latest tools," explains Simpson. "That's why we've moved to smartphone-based NFC ticketing available in Apple or Google Wallets. For guests, it's just like downloading a mobile boarding pass for a flight."

Today, the ticketing workflow is seamless. When consumers purchase a ticket, they receive an instant confirmation, an encrypted e-ticket within seconds and an email with race-day instructions covering dress code, race program and directions. The e-ticket is downloaded directly to wallets in Apple iOS or Android-based smartphones. On race-day, a 'pop up' reminder appears on guests' phones as they approach the racecourse.

To support this, around 45 Janam XT3 rugged touch computer and scanners have been purchased. "The efficiency of the Janam devices is phenomenal. They take literally a fraction of a second to authorize each a ticket," says Simpson. "Most importantly, they work offline and have all the tickets pre-loaded. Before gates open, all the units are refreshed so they have the latest up-to-date data eliminating the need to connect to Wi-Fi and a backend server. They also provide detail to staff about any issues with a particular ticket so better customer service is delivered."

In conjunction with the NFC ticketing project, Chester Racecourse has made significant investments in updating its wireless and wired network to address the legacy IT issues and performance bottlenecks. High performance Wi-Fi 7 access points from Ruckus Networks have been installed, along with a new switches, routers and resilient 10 gigabit Ethernet connections to the Internet.

HID has collaborated closely with Chester Racecourse to develop a bespoke API that now integrates SeatGeek with its EMP. This automation ensures that tickets are updated in the access control database as they are sold, removing the need for an error-prone and time-consuming manual process.

BENEFITS

Chester Racecourse believes it is one of the first racecourses globally to implement NFC ticketing and an end-to-end solution from HID which has radically changed the admissions process. It is super-fast, uses technology consumers are familiar with and has worked faultlessly from day one.

HID has also worked closely with Chester Race Company to educate staff about how best to use its EMP to improve in-house knowledge of the platform so they take on more responsibility and management control. "It's been transformational," says Simpson. "The Janam handsets are intuitive and simple for our colleagues to use



and we've addressed all our entrance issues. When we do post event 'wash up' reviews, admission challenges are no longer a discussion topic which demonstrates just how well the system is performing.

The Janam handsets also work perfectly in low light conditions which is beneficial during evening events held at the racecourse like the [Lord Mayor's Fireworks Extravaganza](#) each November which raises money for local charities.

Operationally, IT staff are rarely required at gates to help resolve issues. Previously, a team of six used to be present; now, due to the changes in the admission system and the investment in infrastructure, only three staff are needed, with their work reallocated and focused on supporting other areas of the business, not ticketing.

Furthermore, NFC ticketing will reduce fraud and stop people sharing, photographing or reselling (paper) tickets with barcodes on. This is simply not possible with a totally digital NFC-based solution. Ultimately, the goal is also to cut out the opportunity for touts to operate, with people directed to official channels like the box office or online for all ticket purchasing and changes which makes Chester Racecourse's business more sustainable and efficient.

"We're the oldest racecourse in the world using leading edge technology," claims Simpson. "From NFC ticketing to advanced networking, we believe no other sports venues have deployed Wi-Fi 7 yet and certainly no racecourses in UK or Europe."

LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Moving forward, Chester Race Company is exploring ways to expand NFC ticketing throughout the group to derive more business value from the investment in HID's technology. "We want to improve pre-race communications, so guests have downloaded their tickets to their digital wallets in advance. This will improve guest flow, so they get in faster and enjoy their day with us," adds Simpson.

Other potential developments could involve using the accreditation module within the HID EMP platform to manage the press and employees of third partner contractors (like food outlets) and the zones they can access.

Given the racecourse site is used to stage other events – from conferences and concerts – the new ticketing solution could also offer more flexibility about how access is then managed and segmented – for example, people buying concert only tickets rather than whole site access. And the Chester Race Company team is actively looking at how guest membership cards and loyalty programs can be managed within the EMP system, too.

"We want to create amazing memories at Chester Racecourse," concludes Simpson, "The new NFC ticketing solution from HID leveraging digital wallets is enabling this by removing the admission headaches we used to have and creating a modern experience for guests, something you wouldn't necessarily expect from a racecourse that's getting close to 500 years old."



"By adopting HID's NFC ticketing technology, we've transformed the entry process, offering guests the ease of smartphone-based tickets in their Apple or Google Wallets. It's just like downloading a mobile boarding pass for an airline flight."

Gareth Simpson,
Head of Racecourse Operations,
Chester Race Company



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