Could the Rio Olympics Bring Enterprise Network Problems?

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Despite an unusually long list of serious concerns, I expect the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Brazil to exceed expectations overall. But is your business or government ready?

No doubt, the global media is highlighting many issues surrounding physical security, infrastructure, the Zika virus and other problems.

So why am I optimistic? Because the "success" bar has been set so very low for these 2016 Olympic Games.

But barring a major terrorist incident, I expect the Brazilian hosts to pull off some positive surprises. Perhaps they will even win over the hearts and minds of the world in the opening and closing ceremonies. Just as they did with the 2014 FIFA (Soccer) World Cup, event organizers should be able to overcome short-term sporting event (and large crowd) obstacles and deliver a memorable few weeks of summer fun for the world to watch.

Once the opening ceremony begins and surprise winners and losers start to emerge, I expect the negative stories will quickly evolve into a series of positive smaller stories

that will become viral in social media channels. I have no idea who will win various events, but there are always upsets and champions that emerge as our new heroes.

Back at Home (and at the Office)

Which leads to the rest of us back at home. Regardless of whether things go poorly or well, one thing is clear — the eyes of the world will be on Brazil from Aug. 5-21. Whether, good, bad or ugly, everyone will be watching events — both live online and in various other forms (from tape delayed to media summary snippets.)

As far as the event schedule goes, NBC has published their plan here. The viewing opportunities include numerous TV channels and websites. As the article states, " NBCOlympics.com and the NBC Sports app will live stream 4,500 total hours — including all Olympic competition for the third consecutive Olympics. ..."

Keeping in mind that Rio de Janeiro is one hour earlier than U.S. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), plenty of events will fall during normal work hours. This also means that the opening and closing ceremonies will begin during work hours on the West Coast and Hawaii.

Sports events that occur during the workday, such as the Olympics, World Cup Soccer and March Madness, can bring down or significantly impact office network speeds and even business ability to process important operational tasks.

Here are some technology-related questions to address in order to keep your network operations running at full capacity in August. Note that several of these items are similar to those offered four years ago when the Olympics were in the UK.

1)   What is your policy regarding personal use of computers, sports and filtering? Can you enforce the policy? What controls are in place? As far as metrics, March Madness has been shown to triple company network traffic. *Note: A few years back (2009-2011), we saw even bigger network increases than that when I was the CTO in Michigan during certain March Madness games. However, it is hard to know in advance which Olympic events might cause a network surge.*

2)   Is watching live sports (or other personal entertainment) videos or streaming media allowed? (For companies that say they just trust their employees to get work done, some extra reminders and oversight may be required in the next few weeks.)

3)   Can you limit bandwidth for video or live streaming, if necessary? Are the tools in place to adequately monitor network performance? (Again, special attention may be needed right now.) Remember that blocking certain networks or content often won't address replays or highlight reels that may go viral.

4)   What is the policy for "inappropriate use" of personally owned devices? Even if the company network may not be impacted, worker productivity can still be a problem.

5)   Beyond the Rio Olympics, think longer term and develop " what if?" scenarios for a variety of sports and/or other entertainment events. Test your controls. Use this as a training opportunity for your network team.

For the sports enthusiast, the opportunities to watch Olympic competitions seem almost endless. Potential issues this time around include the mobile device problem, along with company Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies. So even if you filter sports or limit live streaming on company desktops, laptops or other end user devices, employees may still try to access content via personally owned equipment, such as smartphones. This BYOD use can still impact company networks.

Watch out for the 'Dark Side' of Olympics Online

As we discussed during March Madness, where the people go, the (bad guy) hackers are not far behind.

Whether the technique includes tempting phishing links or fake websites that try to get your credit card or other sensitive data, expect to see the bad guys (or gals) out in force over the next month. We may even see some kind of new hacking threat emerge from the upcoming Black Hat Conference, which is just before the Olympics.

My advice: Know who you trust online in advance, and only buy from reputable websites. Be very careful with viral videos from unknown domains. Also, follow these other tips that were recently released by Ellen Chang at TheStreet.com.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, this isn't the first and this won't be the last time that we discuss the Olympics from a technology perspective at home and work. Previous write-ups on London and Vancouver address several other aspects of infrastructure and security concerns.

Nevertheless, we cannot let our guards down as we defend company business networks heading into August. Plan for the worst and hope for the best, but know that failure in this area can cause serious ramifications to business operations or even to personal and corporate reputations.

On the positive side, plan to enjoy the Olympics and perhaps even watch a few events as a team at work.

The games will begin. But one more time: Is your enterprise ready?

http://www.govtech.com/blogs/lohrmann-on-cybersecurity/could-the-rio-olympics-bring-enterprise-network-problems.html