



The Phoenix Suns pair 5G and MEC with cutting-edge apps to help players soar and give fans a winning experience.

Case study

This is Enterprise Intelligence

The Phoenix Suns basketball team faced two challenges in 2019. After a decade out of the playoffs, they clearly needed to compete more effectively against other NBA teams. And the Suns had to compete for fans and entertainment dollars in a city full of other choices.

The team took several steps to turn things around—and one of those was deploying Verizon 5G Ultra Wideband and 5G Edge at their new state-of-the-art training center and at the Footprint Center where they play.

The team combined hard work, talent, smart coaching and smart management with insights enabled by 5G and mobile edge computing (MEC). The result: The Suns finished the 2021-22 season with the best record in the NBA. They reversed their win-loss record—from 19–63 to 64–18 in three years—and home-game attendance is edging up.

Now the Suns marketing team is turning insights from 5G-enabled performance data into compelling content that engages fans through social and digital platforms.

This is what we call Enterprise Intelligence.

Poor connectivity was a barrier to peak performance.

The Suns' previous practice facility had just four cameras and a slow network, meaning the team had to wait to analyze data and review video. Systems weren't interconnected, and insights suffered.

“We'd be piecing together technologies using APIs and things of that nature, but there would be a bit higher latency than we could work with,” said Dan Costello, Executive Vice President and Chief Revenue Officer for the Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Mercury.

The team needed a modern training facility that would make it easier for coaches and athletes to collect data during practices and turn it into game-changing insights. The Suns also wanted to turn the Footprint Center, where they play, into a true 5G arena to draw more fans and keep them coming back.

From imagination to reality

Dan Costello, Executive Vice President and Chief Revenue Officer for the Suns, said the team's managers envisioned technology that seemed “almost sci-fi ... Like what if we could take all of these different ideas from a variety of different technology perspectives and really start understanding complex movements in real time.”

Verizon helped bring those ideas from the realm of fiction to reality.

“With Verizon, their approach has always been we can do it, fast,” said Phoenix Suns General Manager James Jones. “If it's a connectivity issue, that's easy. If it's a technology issue, that's easy. If you need tech support or vision from an engineering standpoint, design standpoint, we can do that.”

The team began using their new training facility, the Verizon 5G Performance Center, in 2020. It includes 150 HD cameras, sensors, nodes and 3D force plates that can track the motion of players and the ball. Critically, it is also equipped with Verizon 5G Edge, which puts computing power at the edge of the network to speed application performance.

“Verizon has been able to kind of usher in a mindset of innovation.”

—Phoenix Suns General Manager James Jones

How the technology makes a difference

Using Verizon 5G Edge, the Suns now merge computer-aided motion analysis, player and ball tracking, and shot tracking—three usually isolated technologies—into one integrated system.

The Suns can access the data in real time to monitor mechanics and player performance on the court and in the weight room, helping players make subtle adjustments to their shots, footwork and exercise techniques to gain an edge.

Verizon's 5G capabilities can also help trainers leverage artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to analyze full-body kinematics. By monitoring how ankles flex, shoulders hunch and knees bend after every jump shot, trainers can better predict wear and fatigue and rest a player before an injury occurs. Players learn how to spend their energy most effectively.

"We can track where we run on the court, how fast we're going," said Suns forward Cameron Johnson. "So if I'm not getting to the corner where I'm supposed to be, they can tell me if I'm wasting too much energy on X, Y, Z aspect of the game. Because in the NBA, energy is currency."



150 cameras and sensors



360-degree view of a player



Real-time data access

"Verizon has helped push us to a degree of technological advancement within our facility that just isn't seen in sports."

—Ryan Resch, Vice President of Basketball Strategy and Evaluation, Phoenix Suns

Focusing on the fan experience

The Suns fans also get a better experience, thanks to 5G Ultra Wideband at the Footprint Center.

Fans attending games at the Footprint Center can enhance their experience by using their 5G phones to watch live action and instant replays from seven live camera angles.

A new app helps to build more meaningful connections with fans both inside and outside the arena, giving them access to multiple camera angles as well as real-time performance stats and insights.

Verizon 5G Edge could also help the Suns to enable ticketless entry and use near real-time data analytics to predict where and when fans will be in the building. That could help to appropriately staff concession stands, reduce wait times and provide fans with wayfinding to direct them to the areas of the arena with the shortest lines.

"The basketball fan is more sophisticated than ever, so data analytics and insights are more important than ever. Being able to provide that with speed and in real time is critical."

—Tramon Thomas, Vice President of Brand Digital and Social for the Phoenix Suns

With sports betting legal in Arizona, fans can wager during games through their mobile devices or in-person at the Footprint Center.

"Fans are deciding if they want to choose who's going to win the tip, who's going to get the first rebound," Costello said. "For us, it's about engagement and creating excitement in different areas of the game. Game three becomes just as exciting as game 60, and fans are really engaged in every play."

To make that possible, Costello said, you need world-class speed and frictionless payment. "Verizon really sits at the center of that kind of discussion and that gamification of the game."

The 5G difference

Obviously, the talented players, smart coaches and savvy management brought in since 2019 get the lion's share of the credit for the Suns' recent successes. But the technology the Suns brought on board in 2020 has also been an important player.

By using the data the team gets from solutions powered by Verizon, the Suns are playing even smarter basketball and giving fans unprecedented access into what it takes to build one of the most successful franchises in the league.

This is Enterprise Intelligence.

Learn more:
verizon.com/enterpriseintelligence