

## SMART THINKING

Colm Moran, facility manager at Thomond Park, shares how stadium operations can be transformed for the better by technology



**S**tadia are hard venues to manage. Many rely on hundreds, if not thousands, of part time staff to ensure event days go off without a hitch.

At Thomond Park, the home of Munster Rugby Club, on a match day, we see the number of staff rise from a few dozen to over 1,500. Relying on paper-based methods is untenable in the long-term when dealing with that many contractors, so what are the alternatives?

Today, there is the trend to make many things smart. From smart watches to smart cities, technology is revolutionizing all aspects of our lives. Stadium management is no different. However, when we redeveloped Thomond Park in 2008 to increase capacity to over 26,000, our paper-based operation was anything but smart. The clunky and clumsy operation worked, but it was neither streamlined nor intuitive. Reports had to be written up based on the event's notes, with data often being inaccessible until a week after gameday and often not before the next event. By the time we had properly analysed our data, it was already old.

Many in the industry rely on the same slow process. However, thanks to innovations in staff management and operations technology, the industry can finally step up to the next level.

A smart stadium is relatively straightforward to implement and requires just two changes: the deployment of sensors and the use of mobile devices by staff and contractors. Wireless sensors can be deployed in various parts of a stadium to track key assets, from making sure screens are working to monitoring lighting infrastructure. These can feed back data in real time to central management as well as triggering different tasks and workflow orders to ensure action is taken when required.

However, as all operations professionals will know, the key to a smoothly run stadium is good staff. It's the use of technology to empower staff and contractors that really makes a stadium smarter. Solutions such as those we employed at Thomond Park can be used by staff members on their mobile devices. All of the data being monitored by those sensors can be loaded onto an app and sent directly to relevant teams through their mobile devices. These systems also allow for staff members to update their

location through the use of RFID tag technology. The benefit of this allows the control room to see exactly where in the venue staff are, and to be able to coordinate quicker and more effective responses to problems as and when they arise.

The core of what we do in the stadium management industry is ensuring the fan experience is the best it can possibly be. By empowering our frontline staff and streamlining their work, as well as being able to track what needs to be done and who is doing what, stadium managers can spend less time managing people and more time getting on with operations. This allows both the management team and frontline workers to spend less time filling in forms and more time championing and improving the fan experience during an event.

To say that smart stadia are the future would be an understatement. Removing paper-based processes and replacing them with real time data collection, which can be accessed by front-line workers is already revolutionizing stadium operations. Our experience at Thomond Park is proof that it is a smart idea. ■

*Colm Moran has 29 years' experience working as an operations manager across multiple disciplines, including at a multi-award winning stadium. Thomond Park, in Limerick, Ireland, has recently deployed a bespoke digital solution from Over-C to automate operational processes.*

