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IBM Olympic Feature Story

[IBM OLYMPICS FEATURE STORY] [IBM at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games]

[PULL QUOTE]

'Each Olympics is different. Each time, we have new challenges to achieve.']

[FEATURE STORY]

Keeping up with the Times

"I was in Grenoble in '68, and also in Mexico in '68, then Munich in '72, and Montreal in '76. Then I prepared for the games in Moscow in '80. And I worked in Los Angeles in '84...Seoul in '88...I was in Atlanta in '96 and Nagano as well for winter..."

Know anyone who's attended nearly every Olympic Games for the last 40 years? An athlete's career is lucky to last ten years; coaches, maybe 20. But Renald Rutscho of Swatch Timing has worked on and/or attended most of the Games since 1964. He's spent the last 24 of those 36 years helping to combine Swatch Timing's world-renowned timekeeping with IBM's digital technologies. For the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, this means making sure that Swatch's timing processes integrate with IBM's Games Results System (GRS). The Result: accurate scoring for each event, and distribution of the scores to judges, scoreboards, the media, the spectators in Sydney and millions of fans Worldwide-all in real time.

As a young engineer in 1964, Renald took a job at Omega, the Swiss timepiece company, that had handled the timing for past Olympic Games. "At that time, I was an engineer, and there was a job with Omega. And suddenly I was involved with the Olympic games." Omega and Longine, another long-lived timekeeping partner to the Olympics, pooled their resources. They became part of the Swatch Group, to create Swiss Timing-now Swatch Timing-a provider of timekeeping and scoring services. Renald has contact with nearly every aspect of Swatch Timing's integration of IBM technology, from the initial cost quotes (often 5 or 6 years before the Games even start) to the day-to-day maintenance during the actual events.

Renald's responsibilities cover all sports held in Olympic Park, where he must check Swatch Timing's feeds to broadcast television and the IBM Games Results System. The GRS takes the Swatch Timing scores and results, and processes and distributes the information. Renald and his team of over 200 technicians make sure that any connectivity problems get resolved as soon as-if not before-they happen. "I merely have to check everything," he jokes. "We are online with the television (broadcasts) for all timing and results. And I'm always checking with the IBM crew to make sure that the connection is done correctly. If there's a problem during the competition we solve it as quickly as possible."

Swatch Timing uses their technologies for many competitions and world championships, but when working with IBM for the Olympic Games, they pulled out all the stops, adding additional real-time output to a number of competitions. For the race events, Swatch Timing employs a plethora of input devices to track results: Motion sensors and contact tape for bicycling and track, touch pads at either end of the pool for swimming, etc. These go to the Swatch Timing scoreboards and the GRS at the same time. "In these sports, where the real time is very, very important, the time has to go directly to the score board (during the event), and directly to the TV. But the result at the end, and the ceremony, is driven by IBM systems," Renald explains.

One of the more complex-and better-known-Swatch Timing technologies is the Scanovision system, often used for a race's "photo finish." Scanovision is used to time and score track events, rowing, canoeing, and cycling. "The Scanovision is a piece of equipment that takes the picture at the finish line," Renald explains. "We transfer this image into the computer to read it. Two judges decide the 'photo finish'-one from the Australian Federation and one from the International Federation. It's also made available through a collective generator, where the television producers can use it." IBM also takes results at the finish line but the final decision comes from the judges. "Maybe ten or fifteen seconds (after the picture has been taken), the judges make the decision. That result goes into the Games Results System, and then it's sent out to everybody."

Yet even in the face of these complex technologies and his tireless work throughout the process, in the end, "It's always best after the Games, when my work is done." And when that happens, what then? Another international competition? Preparation for the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City? "Then," enthuses Renald, "I take a vacation in Australia."

[LINK/Read more about The Games Results System]

[SIDEBAR/LINK 1: IBM e-Business]

By integrating two disparate systems, IBM and Swatch Timing improved the efficiency of the Games Results System. IBM solutions can do the same for your e-business processes. IBM Integration Solutions Get connected and maximize effectiveness.

[SIDEBAR/LINK 2:Case Study]

The technologies that allow Swatch Timing to work seamlessly with IBM's hardware and software are similar to those helping archaeologists at the University of Alabama consolidate data from various legacy systems.

[e-business][SYDNEY 2000 GAMES SITE][FANMAIL]

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