Mako Networks Secures the
Edinburgh Fringe Festival

The annual Fringe Festival in Edinburgh showcases some of the world's great emerging comedy talent.

This year Underbelly worked with Mako Networks to build a fast, robust, and secure payment system.

During the month of August, the city's population more than doubles as Festival visitors pass through the city's old town, enjoying the many pubs and hospitality areas in addition to great comedy performances.

Since 2001, events company Underbelly has played an integral role in the Fringe, responsible for hosting more than 100 Festival shows in 11 performance spaces over two sites set up specifically for the annual event.

Bar and hospitality concessions contribute significantly to Underbelly's revenue during the Festival, chipping in at least 50 percent of earnings. In each of these venues, it's critically important for Underbelly to accept credit cards in addition to cash. Cards are faster and easier than cash transactions, allowing staff to serve more guests quickly and boost sales. Slow or long queues will send visitors elsewhere, so the ability to rapidly and reliably process card transactions is paramount.

This year, Underbelly worked with Mako Networks to build a fast, robust, and secure payment system that would cope with a high volume of card transactions.

Sarah Fleming, Operations Manager for Underbelly, has been part of the Fringe Festival for the past 13 years. Starting as a student on work experience, she has risen to her present position managing all aspects of the Underbelly's Fringe operations and venues.

"We started talking about setting up a new payment system eight months ago," says Sarah. "We were frustrated with the speed of our terminals. The dial-up connections were too slow and frustrating for both our customers and staff."

"We had a few sales visits from different suppliers, but no one had an IP-based payment system that would work for us, or one that allowed us to use our existing Internet Service Provider. We really wanted the faster processing speeds that IP provides, so when Mako Networks was recommended to us, we were very interested.

Besides faster transactions, IP-based broadband can also offer significant cost savings versus traditional dial-up connections. Instead of paying the cost of dedicated phone lines for each terminal, Underbelly's payment system could share a single Internet connection at each venue.

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One of the Festival venues is a semi-derelict building in the Cowgate neighbourhood of the city. It's perfect for the edgy Fringe theme, and with a little sprucing up, makes for a fun and unique performance space. But for the system installers, it was an annual nightmare to wire up with phone lines.

Says Sarah: "Our phone lines were costing a fortune. We had 17 phone lines – one for each terminal – plus the cost of installation to deal with each year. It cost us nearly £1,000 for two phone lines installed at one venue alone."

"Everything's up, all the time, people really like our bars."

Sarah Fleming, Underbelly Operations Manager

That all changed this year, when an IP-based payment system was installed using networked payment terminals, all connected and protected using Mako 6500 appliances.

"When we ran the first transactions over our new payment network, it was like – woah! – it was so much faster. It seemed to me like 15 times as fast. We had the whole site up and running in about an hour," said Marina Dixon, Festival and Events Producer for Underbelly.

What's more: the systems aren't just fast, they're also secure. Mako 6500 appliances installed on-site monitor and enforce network rules that help prevent unauthorised access or tampering with the terminals. Broadband was still available to management staff for normal business use in their offices, also protected by the same Mako 6500 appliances. Security isn't just nice to have, though. It's mandated by the card schemes.

Each year Underbelly has to complete an assessment of their payment network to ensure it meets the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS) PCI DSS helps to reduce the risk of credit card fraud occurring on Underbelly's payment system, but it's notoriously difficult to understand for non-technical administrators.

"Establishing PCI DSS compliance is a pain for us. There's a massive questionnaire that we need to complete; last year it took us a whole week to do it. There's technical questions in there that a normal person would have no idea how to answer," says Sarah.

The Mako System helps businesses like Underbelly achieve and maintain PCI DSS compliance quickly and easily. Using a secure website designed with a PCI DSS Qualified Security Assessor, in combination with its cloud-managed appliances, Mako can alleviate almost three-quarters of the 212 questions in the PCI DSS certification process. That means managers can spend less time completing paperwork, and more time running their operation.

For Sarah, Marina and the Underbelly team, that means more time to focus on another fun-filled Fringe Festival season.

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