



Chicago Public Radio.

WBEZ
91.5

Situation

Chicago Public Radio is nationally recognized as home to some of radio's most innovative programming and personalities. Its syndicated programs include This American Life, a groundbreaking show that has won nearly every major broadcasting award – including the Peabody, DuPont-Columbia, and Edward R. Murrow Awards. TAL debuted locally in 1995 and is now heard by more than 1.7 million listeners a week on more than 500 public radio stations. Their free podcast is also one of the most popular in America.

The TAL podcast launched in Fall 2006, and several months before, Chicago Public Radio had started a major overhaul of its web audio services, both live and on-demand, the crux of which was migrating formats from RealAudio to mp3. The station's relationship with a well-known content delivery network (CDN) had faltered due to the CDN's inability to help with the transition.

"Our previous CDN had set up our services in a way that was not very helpful to us or our audience..." said Shioh-Jiau Yung, who works on Chicago Public Radio's national initiatives. "Instead of helping us improve and diversify our services, they told us that what we wanted to do wasn't possible – despite widespread evidence to the contrary. The equation just didn't balance. It was extremely frustrating, especially for an organization like Chicago Public Radio, where we need to use our resources wisely."

That frustration led Chicago Public Radio to StreamGuys on the recommendation of a colleague at another major station.

"...working with StreamGuys is like having a team of web media experts in house."

Solution

StreamGuys has worked alongside Chicago Public Radio as a partner in developing new, enterprise-level web audio services – defining, troubleshooting, and scaling them as necessary and advising on emerging technologies, but allowing the situation to grow at its own pace. To start, StreamGuys technical staff set up a Windows server to house two new live streams and on-demand mp3s as well as archival RealAudio. Due to the popularity of the program, it soon became clear that on-demand streaming for This American Life required a dedicated server, and StreamGuys worked with Chicago Public Radio to perform the migration. Additional traffic from the TAL podcast necessitated further expansion, and TAL web audio is now delivered by a cluster of load-balanced, Linux servers.

Concurrent with these developments, StreamGuys supported other Chicago Public Radio productions – from local content, such as Vocalo, to the national program Sound Opinions, from launching other podcasts to hosting entire websites. Moving forward, priorities include the implementation of Flash streaming and ad insertion technology, and the partnership continues to flourish.

"When we're trying to understand or resolve a technical issue..." says Shioh-Jiau Yung, "I love being able to pick up the phone and talk with a real, live person – whether one of their technical services crew or the CTO of the company. And we're not billed separately for tech support, so working with StreamGuys is like having a team of web media experts in house."

For more information about Chicago Public Radio or This American Life, please visit www.chicagopublicradio.org or www.thisamericanlife.org.

"When you work with some hosting providers, you just get dedicated servers," says Kiriki Delany, President of StreamGuys, "but with StreamGuys, you get dedicated people. All the best infrastructure and premium bandwidth comes along with that."