CASE STUDY

Virgin Money London
Marathon goes the distance
to ensure online CX during
its virtual 2020 race

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The Virgin Money London Marathon strengthened its digital platforms ahead of the first virtual edition of the London Marathon in its history to ensure enhanced user experience across its app and website, thanks to a solution from thinkTribe, a leading web performance and testing service provider.

Founded in 1981 by the late Chris Brasher and John Disley, the London Marathon is the world's greatest marathon which has set a world record for a one-day annual fundraising event for 13 successive years, culminating in £66.4million in 2019.

The global Covid-19 pandemic led to the postponement of The 40th Race, originally scheduled for April 2020, followed by the cancellation of the mass event and the creation of the first virtual London Marathon while the world's top elite runners raced on a lap course around St James's Park within a biosecure bubble.

More than 40,000 people entered the virtual event, taking on the challenge of completing The 40th Race – Their Way on a course of their choice at any time between 00:00 to 23:59:59 BST on Sunday 4 October, using the official Virgin Money London Marathon app, powered by TCS, to track their progress and submit their results.

The London Marathon Events team recognised the central role of the app in enabling the race to go ahead in its new virtual format, as Steven Foster, Director of Transformation, explained:

"Put simply, without the app, powered by TCS, there would be no virtual event. We knew that by the very nature of the event going virtual, the requirements of the app would be very different to a 'normal' year. We had to be sure the app was robust enough to support the 40,000 virtual participants so that they could record their race glitch- and error-free, whenever and wherever they completed their 26.2mile route. But we also had to accommodate the influx of an estimated 90,000 friends and family members, who were also using the mobile platform to track the progress of the runners they were supporting."

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This required a complex and extensive testing plan, which sought to realistically recreate the digital conditions of race day, modelling the 'worst case scenario' of numbers of visitors using the app at once, in order to identify where additional infrastructure was needed to enhance performance and user experience. It also needed to ensure that the app closely integrated with the official Virgin Money London Marathon website, where live race results and leader boards were also hosted.

Working to a tight deadline and navigating complex 3rd party integrations, the thinkTribe and London Marathon Events teams were able to enhance the robustness of the app in time for the event, which saw visitor numbers on the app peak at 31k during the 24 hours of The 40th Race.

thinkTribe also worked with London Marathon Events to underpin its 2021 digital ballot entry system, which launched on race day. With a peak of 30,000 user visits per hour, the website needed to be able to accommodate the huge influx of visitors the six days the ballot remained open.

It also added a digital queuing system, which was calibrated to come into effect if visitor numbers went over a certain threshold, meaning the experience of those already on the site wasn't compromised, whilst those wanting to get on the site had clear expectations of how long they would need to wait.

Foster added: "There's no doubt that 2020 came with its own unique set of very difficult challenges, but in the spirit of the Virgin Money London Marathon, there's no way we were going to give up."

"Working with thinkTribe, who were able to unpick complex legacy systems and 3rd party integrations to rigorously test the app and site, we knew that the digital platforms had been put through their paces. This meant we could offer runners and spectators alike a seamless, accurate and glitch-free digital journey on race day," Steven Foster concluded.

Deri Jones, CEO of thinkTribe, commented: "The Virgin Money London Marathon is one of the most iconic races and fundraising events in the world, so we were excited to be able to support them in delivering a completely new virtual format for The 40th Race. Working to a tight deadline and using our specialist knowledge of testing protocols to overcome any challenges was a rewarding experience for the team and meant we could be sure its digital channels were both race-ready and future-fit."

If you would like to schedule a free consultation regarding your website performance concerns, learn more about our performance testing services or arrange a free trial then please contact us.

About thinkTribe

Measuring realistic user experience for peak digital performance
Tribe cloud-based website performance monitoring and load testing services provide unparalleled insight into your customers' digital experience by behaving exactly as end users would. A unique combination of realism – delivered by an intelligent test engine, and expert human insight provides the most accurate, actionable data enabling you to take control of today's performance challenges.

For over ten years, Tribe has helped leading UK brands such as Transport for London, Cineworld, Dixons Carphone, Channel 4 and Debenhams optimise user experience and deliver peak performance.

To discover more about our services or to schedule a FREE consultation or software trial please get in touch;

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