



High stakes for Lenovo in Games

Selina Mitchell
Events

RESPONSIBILITY for the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games lies with a technology company little known outside its home country.

China's Lenovo hopes its role as exclusive computing equipment supplier for the Games will provide a much-needed boost to its brand across the globe.

Now the world's third largest computer maker, Lenovo began investigating more than five years ago the possibility of becoming an Olympics sponsor.

In 2004 it became the first Chinese company to join the Olympic Partner Program after concluding the huge financial commitment and stress of ensuring that the Games ran smoothly would be worth it. Lenovo says its involvement in the Olympics will bolster recognition across the world, and that is priceless.

Lenovo, best known for acquiring IBM's PC unit two years ago, has begun testing thousands of pieces of equipment that will be used during the Games.

Field testing will begin next month and continue across 42 testbeds until June, and there will be last-minute technical rehearsals almost up to the opening ceremony in early August.

The testing phase will be crucial because installation of the complex Games Technology System will occur very quickly.

A trial run at the 2006 Winter Games in Turin was "flawless", Lenovo president and chief executive Bill Amelio says.

Lenovo supplied 5000 desktop PCs, 350 servers and 1000 notebook computers, and hosted seven internet lounges for use by Olympic athletes and visitors. Beijing will be four times the size of Turin and will dwarf other summer Games in scale, because they will be held in seven cities, including Hong Kong, 2400km from Beijing.

More than 14,000 pieces of equipment will be provided by Lenovo as part of the sponsorship to support the 56 venues.

The hardware will be critical to

games management, from gathering and storing athlete data to displaying scores and winners.

Applications running on Lenovo equipment will include the Games Management System, staffing and scheduling, accreditation, transportation, sports entries and qualifications, timing and scoring, and ticketing.

Many of the systems will be duplicated in the seven different cities and controlled remotely.

About 12,000 journalists are expected to report on the Games and will be ready to pounce on any technical glitches.

The stress and resources involved in the project will be worth it, and the Olympic sponsorship is already paying off, Lenovo Olympic technology and sponsorship director Leon Xie says.

"During the IBM acquisition across the globe people were suspicious of what they said was a small Chinese company," he says.

"But when they found Lenovo was listed in Hong Kong and an Olympic sponsor, they were not worried or suspicious any more."

Amelio says the company also scored an early success in its pitch for recognition earlier this year when its design for the Olympic torch was chosen over 300 others.

Amelio promises plenty of "market activation" in each of the 22 cities in five continents the torch visits. Questions remain about the final route of the torch and whether plans to take the flame to the summit of Mount Everest will succeed.

Despite the key marketing goals, Xie says, Lenovo has direct responsibility for the success of the Games. "We have to keep testing until the last moment," he says. "The team's main priority is to ensure an error-free Games. We are not focusing on marketing. If anything goes wrong, the marketing is meaningless. We need to have the Games first."

"The Olympics is not just seven days of events. There is a lot of behind-the-scenes activity for years before the Games begin."

At the moment activity is focused on the Beijing Organising Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad Integration Lab,

in downtown Beijing.

The lab, set up earlier this year, will thoroughly test all the critical systems that will support the Games. About 2000 pieces of equipment have been installed at the Integration Lab: 300 servers, 800 desktop computers, 800 monitors and 70 notebooks.

More than 30 staff are working to configure the equipment for test events in Beijing, and technical staff will be boosted to more than 400 by August 2008.

The systems being run on the hardware include the Games Management System (includes judging), Information Diffusion System, On-venue Results System, and information security and software distribution.

The tests are organised by sport, simulating the venues and Games situations as closely as possible. They include scoring and monitoring as well as automated distribution of competition information and results. Each sport has a cell and when the simulation is complete, a testbed will be set up at the relevant venue.

Forty-two testbeds will run between July and the Games, including a run of equipment during the baseball world championships and an eight-country pre-Games volleyball contest.

"The purpose of the 42 test events is not to find out how good we are but to look for problems," Xie says. "We will use our equipment to see what's going right and wrong, and how our supporting team co-ordinates and co-operates with other sponsors support teams: how is the flow, what are the issues?"

"Then we will take the equipment back and modify it and assess how long it takes for the problem to be solved. The focus is not our hardware or someone else's software. This is a fully integrated interational project."

Amid the taxis, prestige cars, rickshaws and trucks streaming down the skyscraper-lined freeways of the construction site, sits a pillar with a digital display counting down to the Games.

Selina Mitchell travelled to Beijing as a guest of Lenovo.
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