



Managing Volunteers *at the* Western & Southern Open

A Case Study



Since 1899, the Cincinnati, Ohio area has been home to the world-class annual tennis event known as the Western & Southern Open. During one week in August, thousands of tennis fans descend upon the Lindner Family Tennis Center in Mason, a suburb north of the city, to watch many of the premier players in the world compete. To make the event a reality, organizers rely on the help of approximately 1400 volunteers, who are organized into various committees. The Marshals' Committee is one of the larger of these (over 200 members) and indispensable to the event, because it is responsible for maintaining security on the perimeter and within the event venue. In 2019, the organizers of the Western & Southern Open opted to facilitate the optimization of Marshals' task performance by deploying a geointelligent scheduling app that provided real-time visibility into Marshal assigned posts relative to their current position and improved communication capabilities. This case study describes the challenges which led to the app's deployment, how the application provided a useful solution, and how the Marshals' Committee and the event organizers benefited from use of the app.



The Challenge

In the 120 years since the founding of the Western & Southern Open, managing the army of volunteers who make the event possible has largely been a manual effort. Technology made the process easier with spreadsheets, email, and instant communication via mobile phone, but helpful as use of these tools proved to be in scheduling and organizing volunteers, they could not solve a number of issues essential to efficiency and public safety as the event continued to grow in attendance. The lack of effective tools was particularly challenging for the Marshals' Committee.

The Marshals' Committee's purpose is to ensure security and a trouble-free experience for the players and the public during the event. At the beginning of the week, there are 84 locations that must be staffed by a Marshal and ensuring coverage of each of these locations is the Committee's responsibility. As the week progresses and a higher percentage of matches are concentrated on the premiere courts, locations requiring coverage changes, but from day one until closing, the right Marshal must be in position at the right time in each assigned location. Until 2019, Marshals arrived at the event, checked in at the Marshals' Desk (located in the Marshal command center), received their daily paper-copy schedule from Marshals working the Desk, and made their way to assigned posts. The only way for the Marshals' Desk to know with certainty where every Marshal was at any given moment was in-person verification. The team of Marshals used walkie-talkies to communicate with one another, but had only one channel for the entire team that was shared by over 100 people each day. Constant calling out to a Marshal via radio not only chewed up valuable air space on the channel, but was not an effective method of ensuring with accuracy an individual's actual location. Absenteeism posed an additional problem. If any volunteers failed to appear on time (or at all), the Marshals' Desk was left scrambling to fill the positions, particularly those of the highest priority for maintaining security.

The Solution

In 2019, GigFlex LLC, a software firm specializing in geointelligent scheduling technology, presented Western & Southern event organizers with the opportunity to deploy the Marshals' App, a software application customized specifically to facilitate more effective management of the Marshals' Committee volunteers. The app included multiple features for use by both Marshals on location in the field and those at the Marshals' Desk focused on schedules and on monitoring volunteers currently on duty.

Features for Command Center Marshals at the Marshals' Desk:

- Distributing daily rotation schedules for volunteers. GigFlex automatically prioritized schedules so that those schedules covering critical positions on the first rotation critical positions would always be assigned first.
- A dashboard showing:
 - » Tournament shift assignments and daily shift rotations for each Marshal
 - » A site map showing geolocation of every volunteer Marshal who has checked in (Icons in different colors represent Marshals on location. Black icons for Marshals who are where they are supposed to be, purple icons for Marshals who are scheduled for the same location during an entire shift, red icons for Marshals who are not where they should be. Hovering on a Marshal's position provides additional details on current assignment and present location.)
- The ability to do a search for rotation details on each volunteer
- The ability to adjust descriptions of rotation assignments
- The ability to change schedules if needed via the dashboard and immediately notify affected volunteers
- Chat capability allowing the Desk to communicate directly with each Marshal
- Automatic generation of Marshals' Desk assignment report (The report shows which Marshals were assigned to provide ad-hoc support for the Marshals' Desk during every hour of the event)
- Check-in/Check-out report (Time-stamped for each volunteer)

Features for Marshals in the Field:

- Provided ability for Marshals to check in via the App once they have arrived at the venue and automatically have their daily rotation schedules downloaded to their mobile phone.
- Provided Marshals with ability to see which shifts they were assigned to work during the tournament.
- Enabled Marshals to click on any daily rotation assignment and view a description of responsibilities for that rotation.
- Enabled Marshals to message the Marshals' Desk (if, for example, they have a question, are going to be late for a shift, miss a shift or request an additional shift.)

The Benefits

Several different roles exist within the Marshals' Committee organizational structure. The Committee volunteers are managed by Marshal Captains, whose mandate is to ensure compliance with rotation assignments needs and to respond to issues as they arise. Captains also staff the Marshals' Desk and are responsible for administrative process and detail. A Marshals' App dashboard was available to Marshal Captains at the Marshals desk. Post-event surveys indicate that most Captains found the App useful in facilitating their administrative tasks and enhancing security. A summary of key findings was as follows:

- **Security Benefits**

- » Two out of three Marshal Captains felt that the ability of the Marshals' app to identify the location of each Marshal relative to their currently assigned position improved security.

- **Operational Effectiveness Benefits**

- » The following features were identified as valuable or highly valuable by the majority of Marshal Captains:

- Automatic Generation of Marshals' Desk Report (100%)
- Adjust Rotation Assignment Description (83%)
- Check-In Report with Automatic Timestamp of Check-In/Check-Out Times (82%)
- Search Rotation Shifts by Marshal or Rotation ID (82%)
- Shift Dashboard showing Daily Rotation Schedule Assignments (80%)
- Tournament Dashboard Showing All Marshal Shift Assignments (73%)
- Chat Initiated by Marshal (72%)
- Chat Initiated by Marshals Desk (72%)

- **Volunteer Recruiting and Retaining Benefits**

- » GigFlex was also viewed by Marshal Captains as an important volunteer recruiting and retaining tool. 48% of Marshal Captains said they would be more likely to recommend Marshals as a volunteer opportunity if GigFlex were available.

- **Use Benefits**

- » Acceptance of the Marshals' App by Rotation Marshals was also very positive. Only 15% of Marshals found the App difficult to download from the Google Play store or Apple Store. More than two thirds of Marshals found the easy to use and over 40% preferred to electronically check in via the App rather than manually at the Marshals' Desk.

Summary

The GigFlex Marshals' App provided unique tournament security benefits to the Western & Southern Tournament by accurately identifying the location of each volunteer relative to their assigned position at any time and providing exception alerts via text messages to the command center and visually on the tournament grounds site map monitor.



GigFlex Command Center Site Map

The Marshals' App also improved the operational effectiveness of Marshals and was identified as a useful volunteer recruiting and retaining tool.

GigFlex technology can clearly contribute substantially to security, operational effectiveness and worker recruiting/retaining benefits for any “event-oriented” application, especially those that utilize a large number of volunteer and/or outside contractors such as tennis tournaments, golf tournaments, marathons, arena/stadium sporting events and concert events.



About GigFlex

GigFlex LLC is the industry leader in GeoIntelligent Scheduling™, next-generation technology that maximizes the utilization, performance empowerment and retention of today's increasingly mobile workforce. Designed to complement existing scheduling and dispatch systems, Gig Exchange SaaS solutions can be easily deployed across multiple industry sectors including home healthcare, agency staffing, and transportation, enabling clients to quickly generate a positive ROI.

GigFlex LLC | 2108 Dallas Pkwy | Suite 214-1008 | Plano, TX | 75093-4362

Phone: 972.363.4300 | Email: info@gigflex.com

www.gigflex.com