

USS Midway Uses Data to Steer Toward Pandemic Safety

Key Challenges

After COVID-19 hit, the USS Midway Museum needed to monitor the number of guests aboard the ship while physical distancing to comply with health requirements and ensure the safety of staff, volunteers and visitors.

Key Results

The museum was able to safely reopen to the public in July by monitoring security, infrastructure and attendance, and increasing organizational efficiency with actionable insights from Splunk.



Industry: Nonprofit

Solutions: IT Operations, Security, Industrial Data, IoT, Platform

The USS Midway Museum reveals a world typically seen only in history books.

One of San Diego's coveted treasures, the USS Midway was the longest-serving aircraft carrier of the 20th century. Now, more than a million people visit the renowned museum annually to experience a world that's usually reserved for movies and history books.

When the USS Midway Museum reopened after COVID-19 hit, it quickly expanded its use of the Splunk platform, scaling its security and IT use cases to include essential attendance data that enabled the museum to run safely and efficiently. Although the team could access data previously, it required manual intervention, which was inefficient and left many valuable insights untapped.

The museum's information technology team, led by director of IT, Joe Gursky, now manages and tracks attendance by ingesting data from hundreds of security cameras and IoT sensors around the museum into Splunk. The Splunk platform allows the museum's staff to gauge the exact number of guests on board, and ensure proper physical distancing is maintained. Through a series of reports Gursky has created, museum leadership and other teams quickly understand and make decisions based on essential operational data.

Staying Afloat With Data

Through Splunk for Good's product donation program, The Splunk Pledge, the USS Midway Museum originally began using the Splunk platform to monitor their IT and security infrastructure. During the pandemic, however, the museum quickly expanded its use of Splunk to monitor attendance data and keep onboard guest capacity within pre-set limits. This enhanced capability has been critical to ensure visitor and staff safety.

"Splunk is helping us regulate and say, 'Okay, we know we let 150 people in.' If that's our limit, we tell visitors, 'Just hang out for 10 minutes, then you'll be right in,'" says Gursky.

Apprising guests of short wait time goes a long way. Previously, museum staff was stationed at various entrance points, manually tracking visitors' entry and exit. Now, USS Midway team members visualize the information on a mobile dashboard, increasing accuracy, improving collaboration and helping provide a better experience to visitors.

Data-Driven Outcomes

1K+

ticket transactions monitored daily, providing insight into number of visitors

37

network switches monitored to ensure stable, secure infrastructure

1 petabyte

of storage monitored, helping the team keep servers and devices healthy

In the near future, the museum's audio tour analytic will help unlock other ways to bring historical information to the visitor experience. Using Splunk allows greater access to the audio tour's data, so the Midway can determine which audio tours perform best and which visitor touchpoints provide opportunity for greater engagement.

"It's true that Splunk is the Data-to-Everything Platform," says Gursky. "Everything that I've thought of doing with the system has been possible. We can now measure whatever we want."

With a single view of everything from network switches to servers to applications, monitoring the IT infrastructure has become simple. "Splunk is making our data come alive and be meaningful," Gursky says. "We have so much more IT efficiency, which is an organizational benefit since I don't have to hire five more people."

Informed Decisions Across Departments

Gursky's small team of three is using the Data-to-Everything Platform to bolster security and infrastructure monitoring across the ship. Splunk technology will consolidate data from the USS Midway Museum's more than 120 cameras into a single dashboard, helping staff ensure devices are properly functioning and alerting them when suspicious activity is identified on a specific camera at a specific time. Once-deprioritized IT issues are now back on the table, and the team is investigating new paradigms, including better implementations and integrations with the Splunk platform and other software.

"I've been here seven years," Gursky says. "This has been the first opportunity I've had to actually break silos." With multiple departments across the Midway looking at the same data on the same platform, teams are now more informed, collaborative and efficient, easily accessing and sharing information with both colleagues and executives.

"Splunk is the tool that I use to give my users and executives what they want: simple, direct, actionable information," Gursky says. "Our executives — from our CEO to CFO to COO — are saying, 'Splunk is really cool. Can I see this data in the app?' And they're using that actionable data to make decisions and deliver an exceptional experience to our visitors."

"I need to be able to access and analyze a huge amount of information in order to make the best decisions possible for the museum's operations — and COVID-19 has made data access more important than ever," says Mark Berlin, the USS Midway Museum's director of operations. "With Splunk, I can simply pull up the dashboard on my phone to understand what's happening on the ship. The data has always been here, but Splunk has made it more readily accessible and ultimately actionable."

Memorable Experiences

Scaling access to data has awakened a host of opportunities at the USS Midway Museum. In the future, the engineering department will use Splunk to monitor IoT sensors within each of the ship's aircraft elevators, allowing engineers to predict problems and dispatch maintenance before an outage occurs. Gursky also plans to leverage the Splunk platform to track shipments and simplify the logistics behind each delivery — a historically burdensome process that involves engineering resources, an aircraft elevator, shipping containers and the ship's single forklift.

Moving forward, the Midway will also use the Splunk platform to alert on transactions above a set threshold of tickets and help minimize fraud — a feat that depends on access to real-time data.

To further sync the entire organization, the museum will use insights from Splunk to inform event schedules, marketing programs and even vending machine supply. Gursky plans to integrate data from the ship's vending machines with accounting software to ensure machines stay stocked with visitors' favorite selections, even during the busy summer months.



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Joe Gursky, Director of Information Technology at USS Midway

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