

# NetWitness and Ooredoo

Another kind of ‘win’ at a 2022 mega sporting event in Qatar: world-class, secure digital services

## Overview

Securely providing telecommunications services for the world’s largest sporting event was already a challenge. But for Ooredoo, the telecommunications provider, having responsibility for critical national infrastructure raised the stakes even higher.

Ooredoo not only aimed to provide superior, safe basic connectivity and value-added services to a record number of viewers; it also wanted to showcase that the critical telecom sector and the nation of Qatar were ready and able to act as a secure host for other major world events.

Ooredoo was already using NetWitness’s endpoint detection and response (EDR) solution. So as the telecom began preparing for the event, continuing with NetWitness EDR seemed a logical choice.

NetWitness’s experience coordinating threat detection and response at other major events – including a summer 2012 global athletic competition in London – was a plus.

“We had the capability, but we needed a reliable partner,” says Sarah Abdulrahman al-Mawlawi, Ooredoo’s Director of Corporate Information Security.

Ooredoo’s experience using NetWitness platforms – customized retainer and incident response services, in Ooredoo’s case, for telecommunications’ unique needs – put NetWitness on the shortlist among security consultants from the start.

“The Ooredoo and NetWitness teams worked together to define those unique work packages and services to ensure everyone was ready to face the challenge with confidence,” she says. “NetWitness professionals were there to support the allocated resource in time, and we were happy with their professional services.”

## EVENT FACTS



8 stadiums



Social media engagement up 448% over 2018



First-ever 5G service at such a major sporting tournament



Used during final match:  
45.1 TB of cellular data  
8.4 TB of stadium  
650,000+ calls

**ooredoo**

Company: Ooredoo  
Industry: Telecommunications  
Location: Qatar  
Customers: 150 million+

## Before the event: planning and preparation

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Once they'd selected NetWitness, Ooredoo invited us to the table to strategize. We sent threat responders to meet with them regularly starting about one month before the tournament began. Among the questions we discussed:

### **What threats had we seen at other sporting events? What had we learned that we might apply here?**

We had some experience helping detect threats and responding to them at other large events, but providing services for telecommunications was different from what we'd done before.

Ooredoo streamed the tournament from eight stadiums to millions of viewers worldwide, while also providing digital services to game-goers and its own customers outside the stadium. To add to the challenge, the company provided 5G connectivity for virtual and augmented reality, seamless connection between attendees and their family and friends, and other services.

We didn't merely assist Ooredoo as needed; we sent four specialists to Qatar, dedicated solely to threat intelligence, detection, prevention and response. They remained on duty throughout the month-long football tournament.

### **What might we need to do differently for the major sporting event, specifically to protect digital communications among eight stadiums, Ooredoo's networks, servers and customers, and Ooredoo, itself?**

We were well aware of the risk of attempts by hackers and others who might try to disrupt transmission of the games or take advantage of the increased exposure to attack Ooredoo.

"It was mandatory to have great visibility and great capacity to respond immediately to any anomalies on the network," says Marco Faggian, incident response consultant at NetWitness.

Toward this end, we sent responders to Qatar, where they worked from the remote SOC we set up in Ooredoo's Doha headquarters. We also designated responders throughout Europe to be on "standby," able to travel to Qatar at a moment's notice – providing backup 24/7 from before the tournament began until the day after it had ended.

### **Which software would we use with which security controls, and how to customize them especially for this event?**

"We had confidence in NetWitness, and in what we could jointly achieve," says Gaurav Kumar Sharma, Assistant Director Security Architecture and Planning at Ooredoo. "We mapped out the possible risks and determined how to address them.

"And our success in these exercises convinced us that we had made the right choice. The NetWitness team had the right skills and the right technology for the job. We felt confident that we would sail through the tournament and meet our security goals."

Those goals, al-Mawlawi said, included uninterrupted digital services and connections, breach protection, customer data protection, and zero security incidents. Elevating the national image was also a must – a natural for a company affiliated with its country's government.

“We wanted to deliver a message that Ooredoo is well-equipped to support hosting mega events and has reliable cybersecurity capability when it comes to being the flagship telecom carrier. I think we have done that successfully.”

## Teamwork to win the game

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Attacks began to hit Qatar and Ooredoo a week before the opening ceremony. Ooredoo and NetWitness incident responders sprang into action. During the event, as expected, Ooredoo was targeted. Using NetWitness EDR and NetWitness Network Detection and Response (NDR) we responded swiftly and decisively, protecting the nation’s telecom infrastructure from harm.

NetWitness also had a backup team stationed in Qatar in case of a large incident – which, fortunately, wasn’t needed. But not for trying: threat actors were very busy, and kept the Ooredoo team and NetWitness responders on alert.

NetWitness EDR and NDR detected and tracked breach attempts before and during the 64-game event, and even after the final game.

## Many assists to net all the goals

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Throughout the tournament, engineers used a number of NetWitness solutions:

- **NetWitness Endpoint Detection & Response (EDR)**, to find and respond to threats on Ooredoo’s end points, including the many digital devices used for broadcast and transmission
- **NetWitness Network Detection & Response (NDR)**, to inspect and respond to threats uncovered in data packets flowing over all Ooredoo networks, even those that the company had deployed especially for the event.

As a result, the highly skilled NetWitness team’s rapid-fire responses – coupled with the platform’s extensive automated capabilities – blocked every shot, preventing the “rival” teams from scoring a single point.

“Our adversaries tested our capabilities consistently before, during and just after the tournament, and we were targeted with various attacks. We were able to successfully mitigate those attempts. So, I think they understood that we have been prepared and we have done our homework. And they simply couldn’t penetrate our network.”

Security incidents and breach attempts gradually dwindled, al-Awlawi said. “By the finals, they were so quiet. I don’t know whether they were watching the game...or they gave up.”

## A complete success

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**Not a single breach attempt succeeded.** The event experienced not a single service-impacting incident. Working around the clock, the teams kept telecom services running flawlessly, with streaming and other applications uninterrupted, and users of Ooredoo's digital services safe and secure, meeting all Ooredoo's objectives.

"NetWitness helped us by sending knowledgeable and experienced people to be with us here on premises 24/7, before and during the event. They were very supportive, and it was all very smoothly done. We still have ongoing services with NetWitness. Inshallah, we are looking forward to more collaboration with them in the future," said al-Mawlawi.



## About Ooredoo

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Ooredoo (Arabic for "I want") began in 1987 as a telephone exchange. Today, it's Qatar's largest telecommunications company providing mobile digital, broadband and fiber services in 10 countries. With more than 158 million customers, it's also one of the largest telcos in the world and is publicly traded. In 2022, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) named Ooredoo the Official Middle East & Africa Telecommunications Operator for the major sporting event held in Doha in November and December 2022.

## About NetWitness

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NetWitness provides comprehensive and highly scalable threat detection and response capabilities for organizations around the world. The NetWitness Platform delivers complete visibility combined with applied threat intelligence and user behavior analytics to detect, prioritize, investigate threats, and automate response. This empowers security analysts to be more efficient and stay ahead of business-impacting threats. For more information, go to [netwitness.com](https://netwitness.com)