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Case study



# Footprint Center Embraces Innovation as First NBA and WNBA Venue to Implement Evolv

# Footprint Center

**LOCATION:** Phoenix, AZ

**NBA TEAM:** Phoenix Suns

**WNBA:** Phoenix Mercury

**OPENED:** 1992

**CAPACITY:** 17,071

**LATEST RENOVATION:** 2021

**SIZE:** 11 acres

**WEBSITE:** [www.footprintcenter.com](http://www.footprintcenter.com)

## Solution Snapshot

### Goals

- Improve ingress and move guests into the arena quickly and efficiently
- Eliminate lengthy security lines and wait times at entrances, especially right before games or concerts
- Create a more welcoming and frictionless security screening experience
- Modernize security screening as part of larger venue renovation and transformation
- Migrate from legacy walkthrough metal detectors for primary security screening to faster-screening technology
- Optimize security staff operations by allowing them to focus on other guest experience and security functions
- Implement a security screening process that would work well for all guests, including those with mobility challenges or those entering with children and bags

### Solution

#### People

- An Evolv Solutions Engineer worked with the Footprint Center team to configure locations for optimal deployment
- Evolv Customer Success Manager provided onsite training and implementation support, and ongoing support

#### Process

- The Footprint Center team took online training through Evolv Academy in preparation for on-site training and implementation

#### Technology

- 9 Evolv Express® systems
- Evolv Insights®

## Outcomes



**Reduced** security screening lines and wait times



**Implemented** new frictionless security screening within the renovation plans of the arena



**Maintained** a high level of safety and security



**Increased** number of guests passing through non-bag screening lanes by 40%



**Provided** a security screening process that fans find unobtrusive and an easy experience



**Created** a more welcoming, frictionless, and less stressful screening process for all guests and staff



**Optimized** security staff operations, empowering them to focus on customer service and other guest experience functions



**Leveraged** Evolv Insights analytics to track screening performance, make operational improvements, and share updates with leadership



## Secure and Frictionless Security Screening Experience

**Footprint Center, home to the NBA's Phoenix Suns and WNBA's Phoenix Mercury, is a state-of-the-art sports and entertainment venue in the heart of downtown Phoenix.**

As part of a \$230 million renovation project aimed at transforming the fan experience, Footprint Center recognized the need to modernize its security screening process. "Our renovation project was a perfect time for us to tackle a new security screening approach," says Ralph Marchetta, GM at Footprint Center. "We wanted a security screening solution that could provide a high level of safety and security while also creating a more welcoming and frictionless entry experience for guests."

At the same time Footprint Center was working on the renovation project, Vanessa Ward was hired as Vice President of Event Services. Previously, Ward oversaw Guest Services for a sports team that relied on Evolv Express systems for security screening ingress. "I was fortunate to have prior experience with Evolv and understood the differences between x-ray and metal detector technologies and Evolv's AI-driven approach," Ward relates. "Unlike those legacy screening systems, Evolv creates a frictionless, free-flowing ingress process."

“ The Footprint Center team was actually very proactive and hands-on throughout the process. For example, when I told them that I would show them how to use the MyEvolv portal, they told me that they wanted to go through the online training first so that they could develop questions to ask me before the on-site training with me.”

- Aaron Shapiro, Senior Customer Success Manager, Evolv Technology and Entertainment

## Reducing Long Security Lines and Wait Times

One of the problems Ward observed when she arrived at Footprint Center was the presence of lengthy lines and wait queues right before the start of NBA and WNBA games and concerts.

“We had long lines outside the building, especially at crunch time,” she notes. “We weren’t giving our guests the type of ingress experience that we wanted them to have when they arrive at our building.” Marchetta adds, “We were creating a negative experience with our primary security screening process and needed something different. And with the launch of our fully renovated facility, we also wanted to create a new security ingress experience.”

At the same time, Ward indicated she wanted to optimize security staffing operations and focus them on other aspects of security and guest services beyond simply managing the screening technologies at arena entrance points. “We wanted to empower our security staff to do more than simply operate x-ray machines and metal detectors,” she says.

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- Vanessa Ward, VP of Event Services, Footprint Center





## Selecting Evolv for Footprint Center

One of the first recommendations Ward made to Marchetta upon her arrival was for Footprint Center to take a look at Evolv.

“Safety and security are a huge part of our guest experience as well as team member experience,” Marchetta says. “It is the foundation for everything that we do for people. Whether they are here to enjoy a game or concert or here for work, everyone must feel safe in our building.”

Marchetta and Ward also had to consider the unique security challenges posed by NBA and WNBA games. “The NBA and the WNBA are a unique league in America because of the proximity the fans have to the players,” explains Aaron Shapiro, Senior Customer Success Manager at Evolv Technology. “It is the only league in this country where you actually have fans with feet on the same court as the players during the game.” This close proximity required a security solution that could maintain a high level of safety without sacrificing the fan experience.

The Footprint Center team was particularly impressed with Evolv’s focus on innovation and track record of success in sports and entertainment venues across the country. Specifically, Ward had seen how Evolv delivered a seamless traffic flow at the sports stadium where she worked before, and both Marchetta and Ward knew it would resolve the security lines and wait times that plagued Footprint Center’s earlier primary security screening approach based on walkthrough metal detectors. “We were all really intrigued by the possibility of creating a more frictionless experience without compromising security,” Marchetta says. “We have an ownership group, which came in about a year and a half ago, that is committed to innovation and creating a best-in-class guest experience. This includes embracing state-of-the-art technologies like Evolv.”



The relationship we have built with the staff here is phenomenal and something we don’t take for granted. We feel as if we’re part of the Footprint Center ‘family.’”

- Aaron Shapiro,  
Senior Customer Success  
Manager, Evolv Technology



## Relationship Factor and Commitment Bubbled to the Top

Throughout the sales process and then the implementation and ongoing support, Marchetta and Ward indicate Evolv has been very transparent and supportive.

“One of the deciding factors in working with Evolv is that we had such great communication with the team, and they were very good at answering all of our questions,” Ward says. “This level of engagement did not disappear after the equipment arrived on site. Rather, the Evolv team is here regularly, always answers our questions, and responds quickly if a repair or support is needed.”

Marchetta adds, “The Evolv team was very transparent from the start in terms of what the technology would detect and what it would not detect.”

And as any successful relationship is a two-way exchange, the Evolv team has very positive things to say about the Footprint Center team as well.

“The relationship we have built with the staff here is phenomenal and something we don’t take for granted,” Shapiro says. “We feel as if we’re part of the Footprint Center ‘family.’ When I walk through the security screening area today, the Footprint Center team still knows me by name and remembers me as the one who walked them through training on the Express.”



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- Ralph Marchetta, GM, Footprint Center

## Getting Ready to Implement Evolv

**While Footprint Center wanted to move forward and implement Evolv for primary screening at its entrances, it had to wait until the summer of 2023 to do so, as the NBA and WNBA needed to approve the use of Evolv for security screening at game venues.**

When this approval came in, both groups were ready to hit the ground running.

Before system delivery, an Evolv Solutions Engineer worked with the Footprint Center team to ensure they were optimized for security and efficiency. The Evolv Solutions Engineer also worked with Ward and her team to update ConOps documentation. This was crucial as several doors would continue to use traditional metal detectors for screening those with bags due to NBA policy.

The Footprint Center team prepped for the arrival and implementation of the Evolv Express systems by completing online training through Evolv's Academy. "We were able to get the systems stood up in time to test them at several preseason NBA games and concerts in the fall," Shapiro says. "The Footprint Center team was actually very proactive and hands-on throughout the process. For example, when I told them that I would show them how to use the MyEvolv portal, they told me that they wanted to go through the online training first so that they could develop questions to ask me before the onsite training with me."

“ Our renovation project was a perfect time for us to tackle a new security screening approach. We wanted a security screening solution that could provide a high level of safety and security while also creating a more welcoming and frictionless entry experience for guests.”

- Ralph Marchetta, GM, Footprint Center





## Guests Embrace and “Cheer” the New Evolv Technology

When the first Evolv systems went live, Ward remembers her reaction.

“Once the doors opened and people began to flow through the Express—right into the building—you could see the lanes with our legacy walkthrough metal detectors and those with the Evolv Express systems, and there was a dramatic difference,” she recalls. The ones with the metal detectors had lines that were backed up, while the ones with Evolv had no lines.”

This all translates into an improved guest experience. “The reaction from our guests was really positive,” Ward reports. “And the results continue to come in. For example, in the second half of the NBA season, we noticed an uptick in guests adopting our Express screening lanes, coming without their bags and smaller items so they can avoid having their bags passed through the x-ray machines—just breezing right in the building.” Ward highlights that this equates to a 40% increase.

“It still amazes me to see the difference between fans entering the building, those utilizing legacy walkthrough metal detectors versus Evolv,” Marchetta notes. “It is absolutely incredible. Guests regularly comment after passing through an Express lane, saying, ‘Wow, that was easy,’ or, ‘That was a lot easier than the other door.’”

“ To be the first NBA and WNBA-specific venue to go live with Evolv was really exciting. Our owner likes to do things out of the box and to think ahead of the curve, and that was certainly the case with our use of Evolv. We are very pleased to be a role model for other venues as they follow suit.”

- Vanessa Ward, VP of Event Services, Footprint Center

## Positive Response from Security Staff

The deployment of Evolv at Footprint Center yielded significant positive outcomes across multiple areas, from enhancing the guest experience to improving operational efficiencies.

The security staff responded very positively to Evolv. “Evolv has definitely contributed to bolstering our internal team member culture,” Ward observes. “Security staff are no longer tethered to the doors and focused on screening guests one by one. With Evolv, they are able to focus more on the guests coming into the building and can now interact with them. Evolv’s technology is very intuitive to use, and the team was able to learn it and get comfortable with it very quickly.”

## Utilizing Evolv Insights® Reports for Management and Optimization

Getting the Footprint Center team set up and using Evolv Insights analytics was an important objective for Shapiro.

“The team found the MyEvolv portal to be very intuitive and user-friendly,” Ward says. “They were able to get started with data very early on.”

Ward indicates her team generates reports using Evolv Insights after each event and shares them with their leadership team. “We also share occasional updates with our CEO to show the progress we’re making—both year-to-year as well as incrementally,” she explains. “We also use the reports to understand how many guests are coming through our individual entrances and what types of objects are being detected. Indeed, since implementing Evolv, we determined that we no longer needed to route guests to a smaller entrance.”

Ward’s team also leverages tagging data to train security staff, which increases operational efficiencies. “They look at the data from Evolv Insights to review their security processes and become better for their next event,” Shapiro says.



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- Vanessa Ward, VP of Event Services, Footprint Center

## Excited to Be First NBA and WNBA-Specific Venue to Implement Evolv

**Evolv at Footprint Center has been a success, enabling them to improve guest experience and operational efficiency without sacrificing security.**

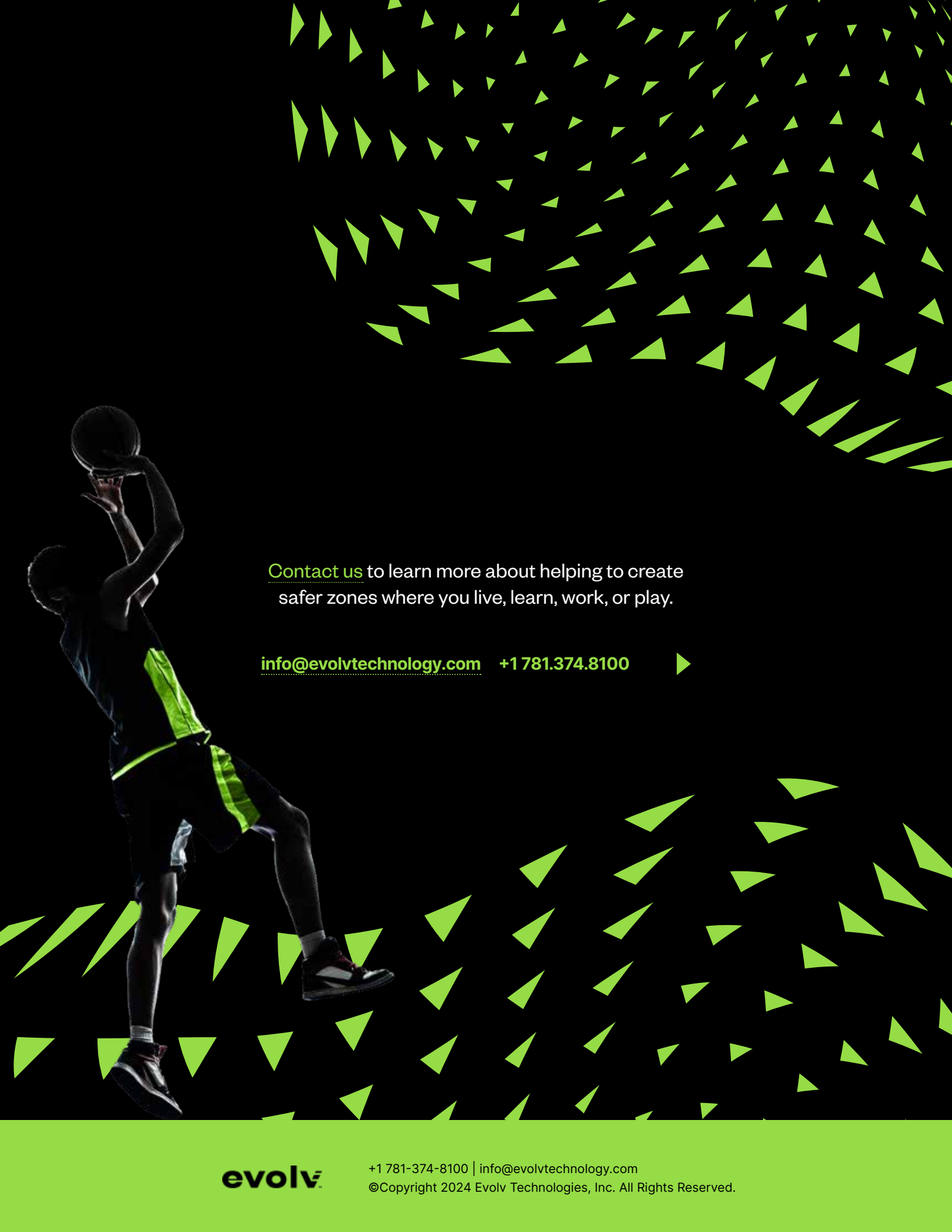
“Once we got the Evolv Express systems in place and figured out what worked for us from a configuration standpoint and dialed in our operations, the outcome has been 100% positive,” Marchetta says. “To be the first NBA and WNBA-specific venue to go live with Evolv was really exciting,” Ward adds. “Our owner likes to do things out of the box and to think ahead of the curve, and that was certainly the case with our use of Evolv. We are very pleased to be a role model for other venues as they follow suit.”

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- Ralph Marchetta, GM, Footprint Center





Contact us to learn more about helping to create  
safer zones where you live, learn, work, or play.

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