



Case study



The Pittsburgh Steelers Add a Defensive Security Layer with Evolv Express®

Acrisure Stadium

LOCATION: Pittsburgh, PA

HOME to the Pittsburgh Steelers

OPENED: 2001

MULTIPURPOSE: Football games, Concerts, and Events

CAPACITY: 68,400

WEBSITE: www.acriscurestadium.com

Solution Snapshot

Goals

- Enable fans to focus on the event rather than worrying about security screening
- Avoid security screening delays during the 30-minute “tailgating” surge
- Get fans into the stadium to enjoy concessions and other venue attractions
- Reduce secondary security screening checks without compromising security
- Streamline ingress flow from security screening into the ticketing systems

Solution

People

- Evolv Engineering Solutions team worked with Acrisure Stadium team to assess ingress requirements and create a solution using Evolv Express® systems
- Customer Success Manager generates weekly Evolv Insights® analytics reports used to optimize staffing resources and configuration of the Express systems

Process

- Customer Success Manager coordinated onsite security staff training and assisted with the configuration and deployment of the Express systems for existing staff

Technology

- 6 Evolv Express Dual-lane Systems
- Evolv Cortex AI®
- Evolv Insights

Outcomes



Reduced number of ingress systems from 110 metal detectors to 6 Express dual lanes – an almost 90% reduction



Reduced security staff fatigue while enabling security operators to focus on fans versus managing the legacy metal detectors



Reallocated 85% of security staff used for ingress to other areas of the stadium



Seamlessly get fans through security screening so that they can get concessions and go to their seats before kickoff



Screened upwards of 68,000 fans during a 50-minute timeframe

Evolv is the **Official Fan Screening Provider** of Acrisure Stadium.

Since the Pandemic, Metal Detectors Can't Cut it Anymore

Each year, Acrisure Stadium in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania hosts over 100 events, including 17 professional and collegiate football games, and a number of major concerts.

"When you're bringing in nearly 70,000 fans or patrons, they are here to experience a really great product—whether a football game or concert," says Travis Baker, Director of Guest Experiences at Acrisure Stadium. "We want to ensure that is exactly what happens, but safely and securely."

For a number of years leading up to the pandemic, Acrisure Stadium used metal detectors to screen fans and patrons for ingress. As they evaluated their different guest experience touchpoints coming out of the pandemic, Acrisure Stadium established an enhanced security screening process as a key objective. "With metal detectors, security screening was plagued by high volumes of alarms," Baker says. "Each of those fans had to pass through secondary security checks where we would do pat downs and bag checks. It was an intrusive experience and certainly not fan friendly."

This experience greatly hindered the fan experience. "The stadium is an important part of the game-day experience for all our fans," explains Rob Thompson, Director of Stadium Event Operations at Acrisure Stadium. "Our Steelers fans are very passionate. They love attending not just games here but also special events."

In addition to the high volume of alarms, Acrisure Stadium found that the metal detectors simply could not scale to handle the volume of fans going through security screening, especially the influx of fans 30 minutes before kickoff. "Lines would back up and fans couldn't get to concessions and their seats in time for kickoff," recalls Joe Simon, the Director of Facility Operations at Acrisure Stadium. "It is human nature, whether you're at a theatrical performance, the airport, amusement park, or sports stadium, that you want to get through security screening quickly and easily. For professional and collegiate games, you want to get inside so that you have time to get concessions, go to the restroom, and find your seat—all before kickoff."



Community Connections Suggest Evolv

The solution to the security screening challenges facing Acrisure Stadium was not far away.

Kevin Wilkes, the VP of Security at Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and an early adopter of Evolv, recommended to Thompson that he should take a look at the Evolv Express®. “We have a tightknit security community in Pittsburgh and frequently share best practices and input,” Thompson observes. “In addition to expediting the time it took to get fans into the stadium, we had seen a spike in acts of violence in the sports and entertainment industries and wanted to up-level our security screening capabilities.”

Thompson and other members of the Acrisure Stadium team engaged Evolv to assess their environment and propose recommendations in terms of the number of Express systems they needed. The Evolv Solutions Engineering team worked with Acrisure Stadium to develop a solution proposal that met stadium requirements. Thompson notes that the Evolv team was excellent to work with, especially on financing and structuring the contract. “The team has been quite open to different options,” Thompson says. “They gave us a full review of the different options, whether a multi-year deal, single-year purchase, or the addition of more systems over time. They have shown great flexibility and worked to accommodate our requirements.”

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- Joe Simon, Director of Facility Operations, Acrisure Stadium



Express Deployment Up-Levels Security Staffing and Event Day Logistics

Deployment of the Evolv Express systems took place during summer 2021, right before the start of the professional and collegiate football seasons.

Since the deployment, the experience for the security team at Acrisure Stadium has been night and day compared to metal detectors. “We would tear down and store the metal detectors after every event and then set them up again,” Simon describes. “It is so much easier for our staff to do so with Evolv. Each Express system replaced 8, 10, or even 12 metal detectors. At the same time, the response of the Evolv team has been very positive.”

The response from the security team to the Express has also been very positive, as they can focus on improving the guest experience rather than on managing metal detectors for the duration of their shift. “They can actually greet the fans as they come through the Express,” Thompson describes. “Evolv is much easier to manage than metal detectors and what security operators had to go through in the past for security ingress.”

For the fans, the impact is just as great. “The Cortex AI capabilities in the Evolv Express makes security screening seem almost invisible,” Baker says. “Fans don’t always realize they have passed through security. And while the alarm rate is much lower than our metal detectors, the accuracy is much greater.”

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“[Evolv Insights] analytics reports are helpful in managing staffing for ingress processes, ticketing systems, and even concessions.”

- Sean O'Grady, Customer Success Manager,
Evolv Technology





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Durability for All Types of Weather

Weather in Pittsburgh can be harsh, hitting the mid or high 90s during summer months and frigid temperatures 10, 15, or 20 degrees below freezing during certain winter months.

“Thus far, the Express systems have operated very well in all types of weather situations,” Thompson reflects. “For example, we saw temperatures 20 degrees below freezing for our Christmas Eve game this past season. We’ve had no issues with the Express systems—hot, cold, rain, or snow.”

Evolv Insights® Optimizes Game Day Operations

Evolv’s Customer Success Managers have played an important role in Acrisure Stadium’s deployment of Express systems.

The day after every professional or collegiate game, Sean O’Grady, Evolv CSM, generates analytics reports with Evolv Insights and shares these with the Acrisure Stadium team.

“The reports contain detail on how many people entered at each gate down to the level of five-minute intervals and what items were found when alarms went off,” O’Grady shares. “These analytics reports are helpful in managing staffing for ingress processes, ticketing systems, and even concessions.”

The team at Acrisure Stadium sees the value in the data and uses it to optimize game day operations. “These Insights reports are extremely valuable in helping us to understand at which ingress points to concentrate more security staff and when,” Baker says. “These are useful in helping us to reconfigure our gate setup and Express deployment. For example, if we’re seeing more flow at one entrance, we can elect to add another Express lane and more security staff. We can also analyze the objects causing alarms and educate our security team on what to look for.”

Reallocation of Security Systems and Staff Bolsters Security

Previously, Acrisure Stadium relied on around 110 walkthrough metal detectors at its different stadium entrances.

These required between two and three security operators to manage, meaning between 200 and 300 security staff in total. With the Evolv Express deployment, Acrisure Stadium reduced that number to a total of six Express dual-lane systems—an almost 90% reduction. Each Express lane is managed by three security operators—one who floats between greeting fans and providing supplemental support for secondary screening, another in the Flow Control position, and one more in the Threat Resolution position. This adds up to an 85% reduction in staff required to manage security ingress (assuming 250 security staff were involved in ingress).

The difference in security staff were reallocated to other areas in the stadium to enhance fan experience as well as bolster security elsewhere. “Evolv enabled us to redeploy security staff members from ingress to other areas in the stadium,” Thompson says. “We can use the staff outside the stadium and other areas within the stadium. Evolv also increases our positions and staffing on the field prior to kickoff.”

“It really feels good knowing that within a 50-minute window we are able not only to get 68,000 fans to their seats quickly but to do so securely. It is a very special feeling.”

- Travis Baker, Director of Guest Experiences,
Acrisure Stadium





Evolv Express Gives Staff Better Purpose and Reduces Fatigue

Beyond the number of security staff needed to operate over 100 metal detectors, staff fatigue was a problem for Acrisure Stadium.

“When you’re pushing fans through metal detectors and doing pat downs, that’s a lot of work,” Thompson says. “Whenever an alarm went off, the security operator must bend down and stand up to conduct the pat down of the fan. This becomes exhausting. Evolv remedies this issue. Our security team, when an alarm does go off, can focus on the exact location of the potential threat due to the red box on the Threat Resolution tablet that shows them where to look.”

Acrisure Stadium takes the experience and engagement of its security team seriously. “We survey our security crews after every event,” Baker reports. “Our goal is to create a positive staff experience. Using Evolv, we have been able to make positive strides on this front. Evolv gives them a purpose, reduces the alarm rates, and makes secondary security checks much easier. Our staff can now interact with fans rather than spending their entire time focused on the metal detectors and running fans through secondary checks.”

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Evolv Relationship Lays the Foundation for Success

Training was one element that was crucial to the successful deployment and ongoing management of the Express systems.

Evolv Customer Success Manager Sean O'Grady worked with the Acrisure Stadium team to ensure they were fully trained on the Express. "Our training included understanding how the tablets work, how to setup, tear down, and store the Express systems, how to manage Flow Control, and what to do when an alarm occurs in what we describe as Threat Resolution," he says.

O'Grady was onsite for nearly all the Steelers games the past year. "Even when we need something last minute resolved, he has worked with us to address the issue," Thompson says. "The entire team has been very hands-on and responsive."

And although Acrisure Stadium has made a significant investment in Evolv, the team has also elected to retain portable next-generation metal detectors at certain locations in the stadium. "We've had conversations with the Evolv team and they have worked with us to ensure our continued success, regardless of the different technologies we have in our environment," Baker observes. "We have a very good relationship."



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A Quick Transition from Tailgating, to Concessions and Kickoffs

When the Express systems were first rolled out, Thompson thought there was no way the small number of Express systems could scan fans fast enough to avoid lines forming.

He was pleasantly surprised. “The Evolv technology is not our old technology, and it was amazing to see them handle a high volume without any challenges,” he comments.

The faster security screening capacity of the Express systems had a positive impact on fans who enjoy tailgating until the last minute. “Our fans like to enjoy tailgating until about half an hour before kickoff,” Thompson says. “On average, it would take upwards of 30 minutes to get through security screening. In addition to being unable to get concessions, they sometimes would miss kickoff.” Now, they can get into the stadium much faster and have time to get concessions before going to the seat and waving their yellow towels at kickoff.”

Baker adds: “Fans get into the stadium quicker and are able to spend more time in concessions and checking out other areas such as the FedEx Great Hall where we display all the Steelers trophies. Before Evolv, some of those who would tailgate until 30 minutes before kickoff often did not have time to partake of these activities.”

Simon adds: “The idea is to have a free-flowing experience to alleviate bottlenecks. Around 15 fans could pass through one metal detector in a minute, while hundreds pass through an Express lane in the same timeframe. As a result, Evolv enables us to move people through screening much faster and into the ticketing system. We always think about the perspective of the fan coming to the game. A lot of what we do is to make sure their experience is great. At the same time, we want to ensure they all get into the stadium safely.”

An added benefit of reducing the screening systems to 6 is the entrance footprint the Acrisure Stadium team is able to reclaim. Having fewer machines at the entrances to the stadium frees up space that helps unclog the “runways” to the ticketing systems, which is another area where fans in the past would get caught in lines. “Previously, fans got stuck in one lane for ticketing after passing through security,” Simon relates. “Now, they have the option of picking a lane—similar to toll plazas on the highway.”



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Pittsburgh Fans Already Know What to Do

Because of the Evolv presence at various venues in Pittsburgh, Acrisure Stadium gets a lot of fans who see the Express systems and know exactly what to do.

Baker relates the following story: “I heard one fan at our last game comment, ‘This is an Evolv system. It is the best in the business.’”

Thompson, Baker, and Simon all believe the Express has been transformative for fan experience. “It’s so much easier to go through the Express system than through a metal detector,” Thompson explains. “You don’t need to stop, unless the system alerts. We actually have fans stop—after going through one of our Express systems—and ask our security staff, ‘Wasn’t I supposed to go through a security checkpoint or process? Did I just walk through security?’ Don’t you want to check my bag?”

Assessing Results Halfway Through the Football Season

But the virtual “invisibility” of security screening for fans created an unforeseen issue for Acrisure Stadium.

As a result, halfway through the football season last fall, the Acrisure Stadium team sat down with the Evolv team to assess the deployment and how everything was progressing. “We found there were too many fans and patrons walking through the Express lanes and not realizing they had gone through security,” O’Grady describes. “They were stopping in the Express lane to wait for someone to conduct a security check on them, even though they had just passed through an Express lane. This was a logistical issue and caused those fans behind them to halt and wait for them to clear from the Express lane.”

As a solution, the Evolv team recommended that Acrisure Stadium put up signage alerting fans that they were entering security screening. Evolv provided the stadium team with signage templates they could choose from, and enabled the setup of these signs where they could have the most impact to fans. “This helped resolve the problem while simultaneously highlighting the benefits of the Evolv technology,” Baker describes.

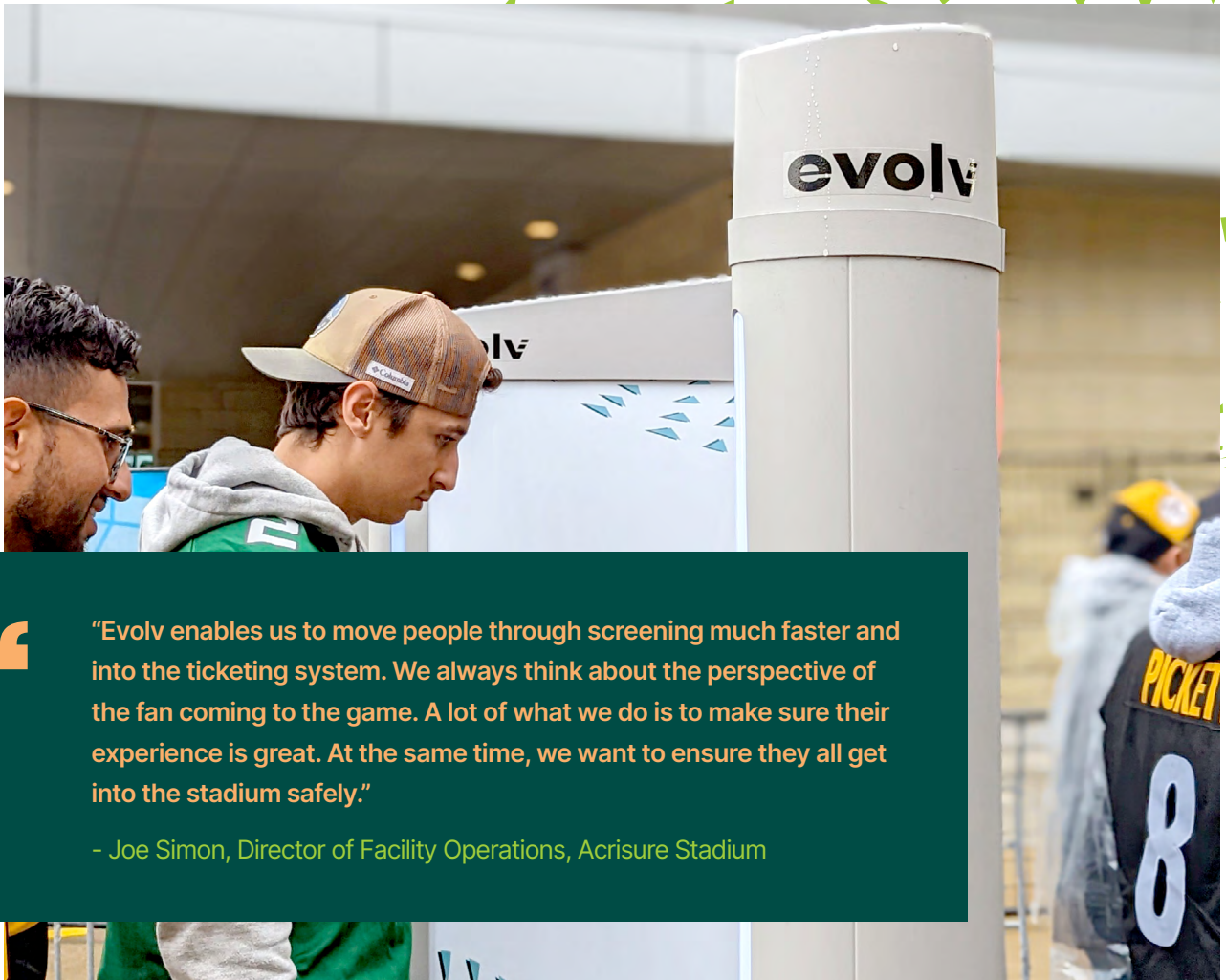
Lessons Learned and a Special Feeling

When asked to reflect on lessons learned, Simon cites two.

“First, you need to ensure your security staff gets as much training as possible,” he says. “They need to know how to operate everything on the front end, understanding the meaning of every action on the tablet and the resulting security process associated with it. Second, while the Express system is really easy to setup and troubleshoot, educating your staff on those nuances and having them test those scenarios out in practice sessions is important.”

Security staff and fan experience go hand-in-hand, and emphasizing the training of the former ensures that the fans can get the best and safest experience possible.

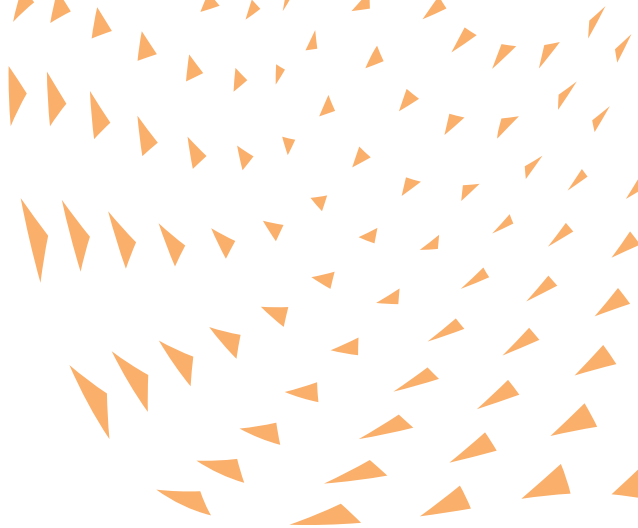
Baker sums up his thoughts: “The ultimate goal is to deliver an enhanced experience, with as little impact possible on our fans when they pass through security screening. It really feels good knowing that within a 50-minute window we are able not only to get 68,000 fans to their seats quickly but to do so securely. It is a very special feeling.”



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

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