Building a foundation for growth

Founded in California, a major building product distributor grew from 28 locations in 2013 to over 200 and counting. To ensure that it could provide consistent, top-notch customer service to all its customers at all its locations, the company turned to Windstream Enterprise to harmonize its ever-expanding network and allow the distributor to take on even more locations.

COMPANY

Industry

Construction Materials

Customer

3,500 employees in over 210 locations

1,700 users

Locations in the U.S. and Canada

A leading North American distributor of specialty building products, tools, fasteners and mechanical insulation

Challenges

Accommodate rapid growth from acquisition

Lack of sufficient bandwith

Need for redundancy

Solutions

SD-WAN Concierge™

Hosted Voice

Results

More bandwidth

Lower latency

Standardized backbone

Seamless growth

Growing pains

The company distributes specialty building products—such as gypsum wallboard, steel studs, suspended ceiling systems and mechanical insulation—to contractors and construction professionals across the U.S. and Canada. The company defines success based on providing the highest quality products and the highest level of service available in the industry. As a result, customers expect their orders to be both fulfilled and shipped to the locations where they're needed on time and in the right quantities.

It's on the IT team at the company to deliver on that customer service mandate. "IT is responsible for all the systems that allow us to deliver successfully to our customers, whether it's logistics systems, ERP systems or even communications systems, like CRM and email," says the company's head of IT.

The IT team supports around 1,700 users throughout the company. Those users include customer service staff, outside sales staff and delivery staff, as well as finance and accounting teams and human resources. With a large user group and a lean team that includes only one network engineer, developing and running a virtualized network environment made the most sense for the company. "We push out all of our end-user applications using virtual desktop, so we require a significant amount of reliable bandwidth at all of our locations."

Compounding that demand for consistent bandwidth was the company's major expansion. In 2013, the company went from an organization with 28 locations to over 200 and counting—across two countries—all supported by the same IT team.

"Our company typically acquires four to six locations at a time, and my team is expected to bring those locations online as rapidly as possible," says the head of IT.

"Often when you've acquired an organization, they didn't care much about their bandwidth, so they usually have the cheapest LAN they could possibly get. It's been a significant challenge to bring network connectivity with sufficient bandwidth online at the pace that the company's grown."

"Trying to support a 100% virtualized environment over that limited bandwidth was quite painful for IT and for our end users."

Complicating the company's acquisition strategy was its existing infrastructure. The company's network was predominantly MPLS supported by T1 lines. The resulting bandwidth limitations negatively impacted the company's performance. Trying to support a 100% virtualized environment over that limited bandwidth was painful for IT and end users.

Speeding up the speed of light

When the company and Windstream Enterprise began discussions about upgrading the company's network, they were looking at a Hosted Voice solution. As talks progressed, the benefits of the SD-WAN Concierge™ solution caught their attention. "Initially, we thought it sounded more like marketing," recalls the head of IT. "But when we had a live demo of SD-WAN and saw the seamless failover between two network connections, we realized that it would be a viable technology for us."

He began to think, "How can we make use of this at our sites?," since the company constantly struggled to get reliable, cost-effective bandwidth to their locations. Windstream Enterprise proposed a pilot deployment as proof of concept, looking at sites that already had dual network connections as the best trial sites to have SD-WAN in place.

The pilot was a success: "There were two things that really impressed us: one was the organization, and the other was the technology." The company found the Windstream Enterprise solutions engineers receptive to their ideas.

"How on earth did they speed up the speed of light?"

The Windstream Enterprise team worked with the company's IT team to roll out the kind of solution that met the company's specific needs—and then some. "When we rolled out SD-WAN to one of our Chicago area sites, we had a 15 to 20 millisecond drop in latency between the site and our data center. It left us asking, 'How on Earth did they speed up the speed of light?'"

Forward and upward

Since the pilot, the company can now add at least a location per day. They plan to keep adding sites until all of their locations are turned up. The centralized SD-WAN Concierge management portal makes it easy to roll out edge devices rapidly. "We look forward to getting it to all of our locations, because it's going to mean that we are finally standardized on one network backbone for every location in the company," says the head of IT. The company has begun rolling out Windstream Enterprise Hosted Voice to its locations as well.

Additionally, those touch-and-go connections are long gone. "With our old solutions having single connections or MPLS backbones, we were always dependent on one connection coming into a location. With SD-WAN Concierge, we can have redundant active-active connections going into a building, and we know it doesn't matter if a connection goes down. Our users are still going to be able to work, no matter what happens."

With more acquisitions in the company's future, it's looking forward to continuing with SD-WAN Concierge on a number of other projects. "We know we're going to continue growing as an organization," observes the head of IT. "We need a partner to assist us in rolling out technology that's going to allow us to expand at the pace that we need to expand."

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