Applegreen

Forecourt retailer helps manage rapid expansion by moving to a Managed Network with Three.

CHALLENGE

Forecourt retailer Applegreen grew from 68 Irish sites at the end of 2009, to more than 243 sites across the UK, Ireland and the US by the end of 2016. The original network had not been designed with such rapid expansion in mind, and used connectivity from eight different telecoms operators. As a result, Applegreen lacked the visibility to manage the network remotely. The infrastructure also had single points of failure, which could have caused the head office, warehouse or retail sites to be knocked offline for extended periods.

Applegreen wanted to replace its network with reliable, secure infrastructure that could grow with the company. It also had to prioritise critical data traffic like customer debit and credit card transactions. "Our sites always have to be on, and always have to be available," says Vincent Nolan, Group Head of Information Technology at Applegreen. Any new network would need to link to all of Applegreen's food offerings – Café Bakewell, Burger King, Subway, Costa Coffee, Greggs, Lavazza, Chopstix, Freshii and 7-Eleven – as well as connect to the off-site disaster recovery facility.

SOLUTION

Applegreen chose Three as its preferred supplier after an extensive review. This was based on several criteria, including Three's strong retail sector references and cost-effective solution that did not compromise on service quality. Additionally, Three's proposal would assign a technical project manager to set up and run the move to the new infrastructure

Three set up a network with resilient, high-capacity internet connections, based on multi-protocol label switching (MPLS). Each Applegreen site now has a backup connection over the Three network that ensures connectivity, even if the primary link is interrupted. The original Wide Area Network (WAN) requirement was to connect 103 stores, but as Applegreen expanded, so too did their requirements. The network now connects 170 stores in the Republic and North of Ireland, as well as their head offices in Ireland and the UK, their warehouse, disaster recovery (DR) facility, and cloud based services.

Three's managed firewall allows Applegreen sites to connect to the internet in a controlled and secure way. It also provides an application monitoring service that lets Applegreen see how critical applications are performing on the network and checks device behaviour. This gives a high level of visibility and security to Applegreen's IT team.

Three manages the network remotely, monitoring each location and providing support from the award-winning Customer Care Centre in Limerick.

Karl McDermott, Head of 3Connected Solutions, Three and Vincent Nolan, Group Head of Information Technology, Applegreen end-to-end monitoring.

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BENEFITS

Vincent says the investment began paying for itself after less than a year. Applegreen plans to use the new network to roll out Unified Communications, which will reduce internal call costs across the group; and to carry machine-to- machine (M2M) data from traffic counters and digital signage systems.

"I'm happy with the choice of MPLS. It gives security of service because of the reliability of the network – which we need in order to comply with payment card industry regulations – and we have the failover option of Three's 3G and 4G network. Every site has a physical connection and mobile connection and they can switch over seamlessly," he says.

"Communications are the lifeblood of a business. You have to have resilient, reliable and available communications, and security is vital. We're a 24/7 business and we now have a stable network with end-to-end monitoring. We now have scalability because we're not limited by the capacity of a network switch, and our firewalls are managed externally. All of that allows us to stay focused on managing our business."

In some cases, Three has delivered connectivity to newly launched Applegreen sites with barely a month's notice. This is an extremely fast turnaround time by industry standards, which Vincent has attested to. "There were a lot of challenges because as a company, we were in transition and there were a lot of moving parts, but Three really showed a commitment to make it work, and they delivered. Consolidating from eight telecoms providers to one was like changing a wheel while the car is moving, but we had no downtime which is a tribute to Three. They delivered the project very well. We were coming from what had been an unstructured, rapidly growing environment, and Three really took the time to understand our business."

To find out more.
Call our Business Team on 1800 200 017

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