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COMCAST BUSINESS SERVICES AND CIENA HELP AXIS41 MOVE TO THE CLOUD AND DRAMATICALLY CUT COSTS

About Axis41

Axis41 is a leading creative marketing agency based in Salt Lake City, Utah. The company, which employs 70 people, delivers a range of services for clients, from strategic planning and brand management to social media campaigns, graphic design, and Web development.

While Axis41 is a relatively small organization, it serves major clients across the U.S., including Adobe, the Utah Jazz NBA basketball team, Outside Magazine's Outsideonline.com, and Novell.

Leading integrated marketing agency Axis41 was working on local servers and using bundled T1 lines to access the Internet. As well as causing delays for creative teams and clients, the slow connection made Axis41 totally dependent on in-house infrastructure, increasing hardware and software costs and worries about security.

To address these issues, Axis41 deployed a Ciena-based access solution from Comcast Business Services. This solution provides ten times more bandwidth for virtually the same cost as the T1 lines, giving marketing personnel and clients access to huge presentation and graphic files, and beta applications in real time.

The super-fast Ciena connection has enabled Axis41 to move several key IT functions to the cloud and consolidate its in-house infrastructure from eight servers to just two. This move has helped the company increase security and reduce hardware costs by 50 percent. In addition, Axis41 has been able to lower management workloads by 75 percent, reduce infrastructure footprint by 80 percent, and cut its electricity bill by 70 percent.

Challenges

Technology is critical for most small businesses, but managing it can only ever be a part-time activity. With restricted IT budgets and small IT teams, infrastructure

and systems must be simple and easy to support—delivering excellent value and performance at all times.

Until recently, this was not the case at tech-savvy marketing agency Axis41, which employs 70 creative professionals, including marketers, designers, and Web developers. The company, based in Salt Lake City, Utah, serves major clients across the U.S., including Adobe, the Utah Jazz NBA basketball team, Outside Magazine's Outsideonline.com, and tech leader Novell.

Reed Wright, partner and co-founder at Axis41, says, "Our technology infrastructure was letting us down. We had a slow connection to the Internet based on expensive, bundled T1 lines, which meant opening large presentations and graphic files was slow for our clients. Our poor connection also caused a lot of frustration for our creative teams as they worked on critical client projects."

As an additional challenge, the IT infrastructure was becoming a major headache for the management team. "To provide enough processing power, storage, and redundancy, we were running a rack of eight servers, attached RAID devices, and back-up power units," says Wright. "Our infrastructure and power costs were extremely high, and security in our server room was a constant worry."

While Axis41 wanted to increase efficiency across all areas of its infrastructure, the starting point was Internet connectivity. "We knew that our most urgent issue was lack of bandwidth," says Wright. "We needed a faster connection without breaking the bank, so we began talking to carriers locally to see who could help us."

Solution

When Axis41 called Comcast Business Services, the carrier proposed a unique small-business solution based on Ciena technology. "Comcast Business Services said they could provide ten times more bandwidth for virtually the same cost as our T1 lines," says Wright. "At the time, we had no idea that the underlying technology for the solution came from Ciena—one of our long-standing clients."

The solution delivered by Comcast Business Services is based on Ciena's LE-311v Service Delivery Switch, which provides scalable Ethernet connectivity to Axis41's Salt Lake City office. The switch can be configured remotely by Comcast Business Services to ramp up available bandwidth on demand, with no need for on-site modifications.

"The Ciena solution helps us use our fiber-based facilities to offer customers like Axis41 a secure, reliable and scalable Ethernet solution," says Karen Schmidt, Executive Director of Product Management and Strategy, Comcast Business Services. "There are three classes of service handling VoIP, email/web, file transfer and now cloud-based applications."

Initially, the Ciena equipment delivered 50MB connectivity for Axis41, although this was quickly doubled to 100MB with only a 15 percent cost increment.

"Comcast Business Services and Ciena have given us 10 times more bandwidth than before, with only a tiny cost increase. What's more, we can scale up capacity seamlessly in the future as and when we need to." says Wright.

As well as providing super-fast connectivity for employees and clients, the new Ciena solution has helped Axis41 simplify and optimize its IT infrastructure. Instead of running servers in-house for email, development, storage, and more, many core IT functions have now been moved to remote, cloud-based infrastructure.

Summary

Challenges

→ Improving service for creatives and clients, because slow T1 lines caused delays and frustration

→ Reducing infrastructure and power costs by consolidating in-house systems

→ Increasing infrastructure security to meet clients' contractual requirements

Solution

→ A super-fast Internet connection from Ciena and Comcast Business Services based on Ciena's LE-311v Service Delivery Switch

→ 100MB connection, which is 10 times faster than T1 lines for virtually the same cost

→ Remote configuration to provide all the additional bandwidth Axis41 needs

→ Consolidation of in-house infrastructure from eight servers to just two devices

Benefits

→ Great client experience with real-time access to large files and applications

→ 50 percent reduction in hardware costs with multiple IT functions moved to the cloud

→ Major additional savings based on a 75 percent reduction in maintenance and 70 percent less electricity used

→ Peace of mind with infrastructure security and redundancy and reduced management requirements

→ Flexibility to increase available bandwidth to 1G and beyond on demand

→ Remote access to support clients across the U.S.

"All we have in our server room now is the Ciena chassis and a single Network Attached Storage (NAS) device," says Wright. "This has helped us achieve big hardware and software savings, and reduced the worry of managing and securing mission-critical infrastructure in-house."

Specifically, the Ciena solution is enabling:

Efficient, online backup

Instead of manually backing up data to tapes, Axis41 now mirrors its data to a secure, remote site online. While backups previously were done each night, they are now completed in real time, ensuring all the latest data will be constantly available in the event of a disruptive, unplanned event. Back-up files can be retrieved much faster with the new online system, eliminating the need to search through boxes of backup tapes.

Streamlined, cloud-based development

While developers previously worked on in-house servers over the LAN, they now develop and test applications on remote servers in the cloud. As well as reducing wait times for saving changes to applications, this move has greatly enhanced the customer experience. "Customers looking at Beta versions of their applications on our internal servers always complained about them being slow," says Wright. "Now, they can get a real sense of how fast the finished product will be and they get a much richer experience," he adds.

Cost-effective email provision

While email systems and storage previously required costly, dedicated server resources internally, these functions have now been moved to the cloud. This has increased email performance and greatly improved security, while reducing in-house hardware requirements.

Benefits

The Ciena solution from Comcast Business Services has helped Axis41 achieve that rare combination of cost-effectiveness: enterprise-class performance and minimal management effort.

"With the Ciena infrastructure in place, our creative teams can work faster, and bandwidth is never a barrier to productivity," says Wright. "We can share the largest presentation and graphic files quickly and cost-effectively with our clients— providing a much richer experience for them."

In addition, the Ciena equipment has enabled Axis41 to replace costly, in-house hardware and software with a worry-free, cloud-based computing environment.

"Since going live with the Ciena solution and emptying out our server room, we have reduced hardware costs by 50 percent and management costs by 75 percent," says Wright. "What's more, we have reduced the footprint of our infrastructure by 80 percent and cut our electricity bill by 70 percent.

"As a small business, these financial, space, and time savings are a huge deal," says Wright. "Instead of spending our time and money on infrastructure, we can employ more people to serve our clients and help grow our business."

The simplified, consolidated architecture also reduces stress for Axis41. "We no longer have the stress of managing, upgrading, supporting, and securing infrastructure in-house," says Wright. "With the consolidated Ciena solution, we can now be sure we can meet our clients' requirements for speed, redundancy, and data back-up and protection."

The flexibility of the Ciena solution is a major benefit for Axis41. "We were able to double available bandwidth to 100MB with a single phone call to Comcast Business Services," says Wright. "What's more, with the Ciena equipment we can increase available capacity to 1G and beyond in the future— with no need to buy any new hardware."

As an additional benefit, the Ciena solution supports remote and mobile working.

"We have clients right across the U.S., from the East Coast to the West," says Wright. "Now, our people can work on-site with clients and access all the IT resources they need, just as if they were working in the office."

Wright wants to spread the word about Ciena solutions and how they can benefit small businesses of all kinds. "The Ciena LE-311v is a game-changer for smaller organizations that work with technology in any way," he says. "As well as helping to improve customer service, Ciena equipment can help consolidate in-house infrastructure, reduce equipment and power costs, and increase focus on core business activities— which is what every small business wants."

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