

Information Technology and Services Firm SRA International Reduces Branch IT Costs

SRA International deployed Cisco WAAS to enable branch IT centralization and maintain LAN-like application performance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>SRA INTERNATIONAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information Technology, Consulting Services, Products and Solutions Fairfax, Virginia 6,400 Employees
<p>BUSINESS CHALLENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure LAN-like application performance for remote users across 48 global sites High costs to manage islands of local servers, storage, patch management Hard to maintain agility and control costs with non standardized and inconsistent IT operations
<p>NETWORK SOLUTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimize WAN to centralize branch server, storage and data protection Maintain LAN-like application performance
<p>BUSINESS RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deferred WAN bandwidth upgrades by 4.8 months on average 100 percent ROI in 8.4 months Simplified branch IT architecture and consistent operations

Overview

SRA solves complex problems of global significance for clients in the national security, civil government and global health markets. The company is a leading provider of technology and strategic consulting services and solutions (including systems design, development, and integration; and outsourcing and managed services).

Founded in 1978 and headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia, SRA International maintains offices in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Africa. The firm's primary data center is in Virginia. SRA also has local servers, tape and backup storage, Microsoft Exchange, and file and print sharing applications across many regional offices.

SRA has been recognized as one of Fortune magazine's 100 best companies to work for nine years in a row from 2000 to 2008, and one of Forbes magazine's 25 fastest growing tech companies in 2007.

After starting at SRA in 2006 Frank Kist soon discovered that branch IT played a critical role in SRA's overall business strategy, where organic growth and M&A activities require fast and simple process integration of 48 sites and more in the future.

Leveraging his extensive leadership and IT innovation experience at the Internal Revenue Service, Road Runner High Speed On-Line (Time Warner Cable), EMI Music, Inc., Calvin Klein Cosmetics, and IBM, Kist decided to pay close attention to IT operations across regional offices, where SRA conducted its business with customers and partners.

"One of the main drivers for our remote office optimization was server sprawl. We had local servers, tape and backup storage, Microsoft Exchange, and file and print sharing applications across many regional offices," says Kist. "We had limited or no onsite IT staff for these locations. Managing these remote servers and storage equipment was difficult and time consuming, which translated into higher operating expenses." Specifically, Kist outlined these challenges:

- Islands of local servers, storage, monthly patch management
- Nonstandardized and inconsistent branch IT operations across sites, which made it difficult and cumbersome to enable new sites for process integration after acquisitions
- Costly WAN bandwidth expenses

On the WAN side, it was critical for SRA to transition to a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) network successfully, along with a branch IT optimization initiative.

Another best practice that is critical for SRA is to ensure that its data is securely protected around the globe.

“When looking at the opportunity to centralize branch IT operations and ensure data protection,” says Kist, “we wanted to make sure that any solution we put in will not compromise data protection, whether it’s for data at rest at those remote locations, or for data in transit.”

Solution

Frank Kist and his team began evaluating WAN optimization solutions from several vendors with four basic criteria including performance, security, compatibility with MPLS, and long-term commitment, investment, and support in this area. In addition to upgrading their network, Frank and his team also needed the ability to monitor and manage their entire infrastructure from a centralized location, and needed the assurance that whatever WAN solution they selected would be compatible with reporting and monitoring functionality.

The team selected Cisco® Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) for use on a Cisco NME-WAE-502 network module embedded in the Cisco Integrated Services Router (ISR) 2811, Cisco WAE 7326 appliances for their primary data center, and Cisco WAE 512 and 612 appliances for branch offices.

“WAN optimization should help ensure security is supported in an unobtrusive manner. High-quality VoIP leverages WAN optimization fully.”

—Frank Kist, Vice President and Chief Information Officer, SRA International

“The ability to integrate WAN optimization services transparently with our existing network services was the key,” says Kist. “The overall deployment went extremely well. The central manager made it easy for us to make changes and apply different policies.”

With respect to security, Kist says the ability of Cisco WAAS to encrypt accelerated data at rest in remote offices and allow stateful inspection of accelerated data in transit gave SRA the confidence to deploy WAN optimization without compromising security down the road.

“It was important for us to maintain our secure data protection best practices” says Kist. “WAN optimization should help ensure security is supported in an unobtrusive manner.”

“Implementing WAAS also did not break our functionality at any point during implementation,” says Kist. “Because we monitor a number of infrastructure items including servers, routers, and switches centrally, having monitoring capabilities remain consistent during the upgrade was critical.”

Results

“It was important that the devices we put in place were transparent to our employees,” says Kist. “Our remote office employees did not notice that we have removed their local servers, and now Microsoft Exchange and file-sharing application are optimized centrally from our data center. Immediately following the upgrade to the WAAS devices, traffic began routing through at speeds that were on par with LAN speeds at the local offices as if the data was working off a local network and not coming from a central location,” says Kist. “My team is no longer receiving calls with complaints from users that application delivery is slow.”

Since deploying Cisco WAAS to 48 sites across the United States and Europe, Kist says he and his team were able to defer WAN bandwidth upgrades for an average of 4.8 months and achieved 100 percent return on investment (ROI) within 8.4 months.

“The cost savings mainly came from reduced initial bandwidth, operations and management expenses with centralized servers, storage, and application delivery” says Kist. “The results we are seeing are significant. We were able to take Microsoft Exchange and file servers out of many branch offices, consolidate them centrally, and simplify server management. Because of WAN optimization, we were able to maintain a LAN-like experience for our remote users. We have all our sites optimized now, and I can see us being able to activate new sites using this standard approach, thus reducing the time to integrate new sites, including new acquisitions.”

According to Kist, the following IT results have been achieved:

- Simplified branch IT architecture
- Consistent and simplified IT operations
- Centralized servers and storage
- Reduced operations complexity
- Centralized data protection solution

“Ultimately, one of the biggest pluses for us has been optimizing our remote employee’s productivity while lowering our infrastructure costs,” says Kist.

Next Steps

As Frank Kist and his team look to the future of the SRA IT infrastructure, the following initiatives are on the forefront of their minds.

- The centralized data protection via data encryption enabled through secure WAN optimization;
- The completion of server consolidation to the data center from the remote offices, thus reducing the number of Windows servers to manage, patch, etc.;
- Unified communications will allow for standardization of voice, fax and messaging at our remote offices reducing the resources required;
- The acceleration of mobile employees such as telecommuters with LAN like performance.

PRODUCT LIST**Cisco Application Networking Services:**

- Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS)
- Cisco WAE-7326
- Cisco ISR 2811
- Cisco NME-WAE-502
- Cisco WAE 512
- Cisco WAE 612

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco WAAS, please visit <http://www.cisco.com/go/waas>.



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