

CST Corporation: Systems Integrator Offers Affordable Managed Services

CST Corp deploys Cisco Monitor Director for cost-effective 24-hour services to SMBs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>CST CORP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems Integrator • Houston, Texas, USA • 10 Employees
<p>BUSINESS CHALLENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop profitable recurring revenue business model • Establish long-term relationships as trusted advisor to clients • Scale service as business grows
<p>NETWORK SOLUTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automated monitoring software at CST Corp network operations center and at client sites
<p>BUSINESS RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low capital expenditures through simple deployment architecture • Low operating costs over comparable VPN mesh solutions • Trusted advisory relationships with customers strengthened through robust reporting features

Business Challenge

As a systems integrator in the telecommunications industry, CST Corp seeks to become a one-stop solution provider for the technology needs of its client companies, offering a comprehensive portfolio of voice, data, and network products and services. CST Corp is a Cisco® Certified Premier Partner, and its highly trained team includes several Cisco Certified Internetworking Experts (CCIEs®). The service portfolio includes traditional, IP, and wireless telephony; network and data design, installation, and maintenance; information security and disaster recovery; staff augmentation; outsourcing services such as testing and help desk support; application development; project management; and business analysis and business process re-engineering. Many of its clients are in the healthcare or oil and gas (energy) businesses.

CST Corp actively works to become trusted advisor to its clients, helping them to choose technology solutions that support their business processes and strategies and plan for growth over time.

This emphasis on building long-term client relationships positions CST Corp to reach an often overlooked, but potentially lucrative, market: small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) (five to 1000 employees). This market typically has minimal IT staff who rarely has resources available to perform adequate day-to-day network monitoring. Among its “Day-2” managed services, CST Corp offers 24-hour network monitoring service. This service enables SMBs to transition from a reactive, fire-fighting management mode toward a proactive, strategic IT management style. This shift allows clients to spend their limited IT budgets on projects that improve business processes, allowing them to compete more effectively in their markets.

In designing its managed services, CST Corp faced several technical challenges. Many service providers deploy complex VPN or private-line meshes to connect with client sites, then pipe all Simple Network Management Protocol (SNMP) traffic from every client device into a central management system that correlates and interprets it. Enabling automated service capabilities in such a system is complicated. This traditional approach creates complexity, limits scalability, contains inherent security risks, and is expensive to deploy and manage. The central management system needs the ability to associate specific device streams with individual clients, adding a layer

of complexity, especially when a client deploys a new device or takes an old one out of service. These reasons present barriers to entry into the SMB market.

Business Result

The Cisco Monitor Director solution allows CST Corp to reduce capital and operational expenditures and respond quickly to service requests. Deployment at a client site takes less than a day (typically four hours). CST Corp does not have to set up private lines or VPN meshes to connect with its clients. Cisco Monitor Director readily distinguishes one client from another through the Cisco Monitor Director Agent identification. All these factors reduce implementation cost and expense, making it possible to offer managed services at a price that SMBs can afford. Cisco Monitor Director enables CST Corp to use a leveraged business model to achieve profitability and grow its business.

Clients immediately see the value of having expertise available 24 hours a day. For example, an after-hours outage at a small business may go unnoticed until the next morning. An outage to a critical system—such as a phone switch—directly affects the client's ability to do business. Cisco Monitor Director Agent alerts Cisco Monitor Director, which informs CST operators, who can dispatch a technician to fix the problem before client employees come to work the next morning.

The Cisco Monitor Director solution directly supports CST Corp efforts to build lasting relationships with its clients, yielding recurring revenue streams for business growth. The software includes robust reporting features that CST Corp uses for billing and service-level agreement (SLA) reporting to clients. CST account executives can use these reports to discuss with clients issues such as intermittent problems, capacity planning, and upgrade planning, all common activities for SMBs that typically have limited IT budgets and long planning cycles. SMBs can then budget for upgrades and improvements to proactively support business growth. "Having the report helps our clients to make decisions faster," says Sanjeet Chauhan, president and founder of CST Corp.

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—Albert Leung, Chief Technology Officer and CCIE, CST Corp

Network Solution

CST Corp developed and a proprietary network management system for clients with traditional private branch exchanges (PBXs). This system provides scalable monitoring of client systems, with automated event responses and escalation. As a Cisco Premier Partner, CST Corp wanted a similar monitoring solution for its clients with Cisco networks and Cisco IP telephony. It chose Cisco Monitor Director, a software solution designed specifically to support managed services to the SMB market.

"Cisco Monitor Director has really simplified deploying the managed service solution and also makes it extremely scalable. We don't have to worry about firewall capacity or VPN meshes. It makes our lives so much simpler," says Albert Leung, chief technology officer at CST Corp.

Cisco Monitor Director offers a unique approach that eliminates the need for costly VPN meshes and high-powered central processing systems. The software includes two complementary components: Cisco Monitor Director Agent and Cisco Monitor Director. Cisco Monitor Director Agent is deployed at the client site, where it performs primary monitoring functions such as polling, assimilation, filtering, and event response. Using an encrypted Web connection, Cisco Monitor Director Agent sends periodic status updates to Cisco Monitor Director, which is deployed at the CST Corp network operations center. When an event occurs, Monitor Director Agent sends an alert to Monitor Director, which prioritizes the severity of the event and responds according to configured policy, which could include automated responses or escalation to an operator. This capability allows CST Corp to identify and address issues before they become outages.

Cisco Monitor Director solution provides visibility into all types of network device, monitoring data, voice, and video services. Many SMB clients have networking devices from multiple vendors. The solution also supports non-Cisco, SNMP-capable, IP-addressable devices, enabling CST Corp to monitor multivendor client networks with a single management solution.

Next Steps

CST Corp has existing relationships with clients that use traditional time-division multiplexing (TDM) systems. As a Cisco Certified Premier Partner, CST is ready to help these clients migrate to Cisco Unified Communications solutions when their PBX vendor service contracts expire. “The primary reason that we are still involved with the TDM base is we’re hoping to move those clients to Cisco Unified Communications solutions,” says Leung. “Cisco has always had an extraordinary portfolio of products, and the Cisco Monitor Director solution is certainly no exception.”

For More Information

To learn more about the Cisco Monitor Director network management solution for managed services to small and medium-sized businesses, go online to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/cmd>.

PRODUCT LIST
<p>Network Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Monitor Director • Cisco Monitor Director Agent



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