

Manufacturer Improves IT Productivity with Greater Network Visibility



Smart Net Total Care is a force-multiplier for Pella inventory business lifecycle management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PELLA CORPORATION

- Manufacturing
- Pella, Iowa USA
- 6000 Employees

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Lack of visibility into device vulnerability and support status increased operational risk
- Lengthy time required for contract renewal process
- Lean IT staffing required network management priority trade-offs

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Cisco Smart Net Total Care

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Significantly reduced network risk
- Gained instant visibility into devices facing end of service and/or end of life
- Single source of truth for both Pella and Cisco partner in network understanding

Business Challenge

Pella Corporation is one of the premier brands in the manufacturing of windows and doors for residential and commercial use throughout North America. Privately owned and headquartered in Pella, Iowa, since its founding in 1925, Pella has built a reputation as an industry innovator from day one. The company has been awarded more than 100 product and design patents.

The word innovation describes more than just Pella products. From the continuous improvement methods used in building its windows and doors, to the way a consumer can shop for them at 200 Pella Window and Door Showrooms, to the way the windows are installed in homes, practical, common-sense innovation at Pella is everyone's job. This includes the company's network infrastructure operations team.

With almost 1000 devices in its network, the tightly staffed Pella IT team needs to work smartly and efficiently but, above all, it needs to ensure that nothing is overlooked in maintaining network security. With the need to protect its own network, plus network services for some of the independent dealerships that sell Pella products, the company wants to protect its customers, team members, and brand.

That was the initial appeal of Cisco® Smart Net Total Care when Pella first reviewed the service. It promised a much more efficient and effective way for the company to introduce true installed-base device lifecycle management to the organization, especially pertaining to its security requirements.

Smart Net Total Care provides a single-service delivery solution, including contract management, foundational technical services, and device diagnostics powered by Cisco® Smart Call Home, plus security and other alert notifications for Cisco products. Using its ability for detailed discovery of Cisco network devices, the solution offers actionable intelligence and proactive support capabilities that can help Pella reduce operating costs, minimize downtime, and reduce network risk.

Pella did not have the visibility it needed into each network device with its associated software version and support coverage information. It was difficult to identify end-of-life or end-of-service devices, or support contract renewal dates. A third-party software solution helped in managing Pella inventory. But it lacked the ability to pinpoint device vulnerabilities, as well as to access the depth of information and analysis provided by the Cisco backend for Smart Net Total Care. Previously, a Pella team member would need to comb through hundreds of security bugs posted on the Cisco website to try and determine which alerts pertained to specific devices on its network. Not only was this process time-consuming, but it also meant that other network priorities might not get the attention they required. Without a clear view into all of the device models and software versions installed on its Cisco network, Pella had an increased risk of problems due to software version incompatibilities, outdated patches, items out of service and equipment facing end of life.

“Finding security vulnerabilities was very time consuming,” says Lynn Starkey, Senior Network & Security Engineer for Pella. “While bugs were listed on the Cisco website, finding the vulnerabilities that pertain to us among the minutiae was daunting. It was difficult to locate the specific information that was relevant to the equipment models and code versions in our network inventory.”

“Smart Net Total Care is a lifesaver when it comes to managing the lifecycle of our network devices. It’s the sort of tool that gives you a big picture of your network environment. With a lean IT organization, the automation on the Smart Net Total Care backend makes a small team’s performance large in execution and impossible to do otherwise. It’s a force-multiplier!”

—John Baldwin, Pella IT Manager for Infrastructure Projects and Architectures

Network Solution

Following a successful, short test period, Pella implemented Smart Net Total Care to help it address these challenges. After less than six months of use, Pella has been able to bring together its Cisco networking equipment and support contract inventory data in one place using Smart Net Total Care. Moreover, by providing access to OneNeck, the company’s Cisco Authorized Partner, which assists with network maintenance, Smart Net Total Care provides a single source of truth for both companies to facilitate fast, accurate understanding of the status of all Cisco network equipment. The Smart Net Total Care web portal provides team members with a secure environment to access, review, modify, and download reports. In-depth reporting enables the two teams to identify devices that need system updates, support contracts coming up for renewal, and the level of service coverage for each device.

Using the filtering capability of Smart Net Total Care, Pella can quickly identify alerts that apply to only specific devices in its infrastructure, making it easier for their team to assess vulnerabilities and take corrective action. And Pella is just starting to see the benefits of device information provided by Smart Net Total Care when accessing the Cisco Technical Assistance Center (TAC). By having detailed data for each network device, such as the product serial number, immediately at hand, Pella anticipates that TAC calls should go much smoother and faster.

The comprehensive data gathered by Smart Net Total Care has been an asset for planning and budgeting, which will only increase in value over time, according to Pella. For example, software for certain hardware, such as switch stacks, can be upgraded to only a certain point but no further. Knowing which stacks are impacted permits the company to deploy this equipment to parts of the network where they pose less risk. Similarly, by identifying real or potential device vulnerabilities at the core of its network, Smart Net Total Care allows the company to take proactive steps to preempt problems before they occur.

Based on its success to date with Smart Net Total Care, Pella had an opportunity to preview the newest version of the Service prior to its public introduction in early 2015. Test driving the software's new features gave Pella even more enthusiasm about what it expects to gain from Smart Net Total Care moving forward.

The Service's new interface is especially appealing in its ability to ease workflow. For example, Pella can easily drill down to information for a particular device to determine possible security vulnerabilities. All the data needed is right at users' fingertips; they don't need to click through multiple menus. Equally appealing is the software's ability to quickly determine both covered and uncovered items, and then letting you put them in their own categories to quickly pinpoint gaps in service coverage. The software conforms to the way users work, so users don't have to change their individual work styles.

Another compelling new feature in the next generation of Smart Net Total Care is its ability to filter by different fields. This helps Pella get routers, switches, access points, and firewalls standardized from a Simple Network Management Protocol (SNMP) standpoint, so a user can filter by location, or by a type of switch or router. Filtering also makes other data stand out from a user perspective, facilitating changes and helping to make device support easier in the long term.

Previously, creating reports was a laborious process. Now, with the new "Schedule Reports" feature, users can specify an hour and a date, and a report is automatically created. Users are notified of its availability at a specified point in time. This helps make reporting simple, fast and pain free. Now, users can spend more time analyzing reports than administrating their creations. And Pella has already kicked off a process to upgrade its firewall software. Using the Schedule Reports capability, it is easy to determine the right information to create a work list.

Business Results

Pella is seeing results from Smart Net Total Care across the board, starting with simplified collaboration between Pella and its partner OneNeck. Before, each company maintained the inventory information on separate spreadsheets. Through the web portal, team members have access to consistent reports and equal visibility into network systems. As a result, the two teams are able to collaborate more closely and avoid duplicate efforts. Now, as John Baldwin, Pella IT Manager for Infrastructure Projects and Architecture says, "We're singing from the same song sheet."

A strong security posture begins with having an accurate view of your entire network inventory. Consequently, the Smart Net Total Care reporting functionality is also making Baldwin's job easier when communicating with senior management. He can confidently show the network's current security posture. Similarly, he can contrast the before and after lifecycle status of each device across the Sales, Distribution, and Manufacturing organizations. This

would have been difficult, if not impossible, previously without the centralized data repository made possible by Smart Net Total Care.

With the wealth of inventory data made available by Smart Net Total Care, Pella is actually looking forward to the next contract renewal process. What used to be an arduous, time-consuming process that took as long as two months is now expected to take less than one week.

Pella is very happy with the value it has realized from Smart Net Total Care so far and expects to see even more value in the future when it begins to take advantage of the new functionality of the Service's newest release, version 3.0. With this latest advance in capabilities, plus future Cisco product enhancements based on Pella input, the company anticipates even greater time savings, faster problem resolution times, and improved network security.

Baldwin summarizes the Pella experience with Smart Net Total Care, "Smart Net Total Care is a lifesaver when it comes to managing the lifecycle of our network devices. It's the sort of tool that gives you a big picture of your network environment." As it pertains to his own organization, Baldwin further says, "With a lean IT organization, the automation on the Smart Net Total Care backend makes a small team's performance large in execution and impossible to do otherwise. It's a force multiplier!"

For More Information

To learn more about Pella Corporation, visit <http://www.pella.com>

To find out more about Cisco Smart Net Total Care, go to: www.cisco.com/go/total



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