



OPSM implements a scalable and secure solution for retail expansion with a **Cisco Virtual Private Network**

Background

Founded in 1932, the OPSM Group is an Australian retail chain that specialises in all aspects of eyecare and eyewear, including prescription glasses, contact lenses and sunglasses.

Its retail arm comprises well-known Australian trading brands, including: OPSM; Budget Eyewear; Laubman & Pank; Kay's Optical and Precision Eyewear as well as The Optical Shop & The Optical Centre in Hong Kong. The company has an annual turnover in excess of \$400 million and has approximately 600 retail stores throughout Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. It also trades via its website, OPSM Direct, which sells contact lenses online, and owns EyeBiz, a lens grinding laboratory.

Challenge

In 2001, The OPSM Group management decided to focus on optical retailing and grow by acquisition; the target being to expand to 1000 retail stores by 2006. This involved purchasing a large number of retail outlets, each with legacy technology and computing systems.

Alex Chisholm, Group IT Manager, OPSM Group, comments; "From a technology perspective the first priority was to standardise on a common point-of-sale (POS). The OPSM Group already had a proprietary POS in place in its OPSM stores, called Focus, which suited our requirements and so we decided to implement that across all our non-OPSM branded stores.

However, stores were connecting to the centralised systems a few times a day using dial-up access and we realised that in order to move forward, all our stores needed dynamic, real-time access to the head office systems in order to place orders and to make enquiries on our centralised customer databases, our supply chain systems, our knowledge systems and Intranet.

From a management perspective, having such an infrastructure in place would also enable us to better manage our optical laboratories and to ensure proper fulfilment of our supply chain obligations.

For the stores, it would provide more up-to-date information and improved customer service."

OPSM also has a centralised Customer Resource

Management (CRM) solution and the plans include allowing store staff to access this information by way of the on-line connection so that up-to-date information about customers is available.

Alex Chisholm comments: "For us, the entire focus of our technology improvements was to improve the customer experience. With a centralised CRM database able to be accessed from any store, our customers will have the flexibility to visit any retail store in our chain and be correctly identified. Staff will be able to easily view customer prescription requirements and contact details online, making it convenient and easy to order from us. With online access to our laboratory and ordering systems, staff will also be able to inform customers of exactly when they could expect their order."

Another important consideration was scalability. "With a projected 400 retail outlets coming on board in the next three years, we needed a cost-effective, flexible architecture that could cater for growth.

Solution

After discussions with Cisco, it was decided that a Virtual Private Network (VPN) offered the most cost-effective and scalable networking solution. In order to achieve the required levels of security, a Cisco PIX firewall 515 was installed at the OPSM head office in Auburn and an 800 series Cisco Router running the firewall and VPN software within Cisco IOS will be installed in each branch. As well as providing VPN functions, the Cisco IOS software encrypts customer data and sensitive company information, travelling over the public Internet.

David Newton, Technology Development Manager, OPSM, comments. "With customer details, security was paramount. We were confident in the 3DES security that the Cisco IOS software offered, providing encrypted, secure data."

Each store operates a LINUX server where the FOCUS application is housed. When the Cisco technology is deployed, this server will be able to send order and inventory requests to head office in real-time. As each store comes online with the new system, head office IT support personnel will be able to manage its technology installation from a desktop in Auburn using the Cisco IOS software.

David comments: " It is very straightforward to manage and being Internet browser-based, we can manage it from anywhere, even at home, should we need to."

With an eye on the future a Cisco Catalyst 6500 switch was also installed at the head office in Auburn in anticipation of leveraging a converged (voice and data) network down the track.

Benefits

The key benefits from the new technology infrastructure are in improved customer service levels.

In OPSM's Penrith store, which is a showcase and test-bed for how it is intended to do business, improvements have already been seen since the store was revamped and the new technology installed.

Aside from the benefits to customers, being connected will also benefit staff. They will have email and intranet access over the network enabling them to view company policies, procedures and announcements as well as contacting head office regarding leave and any Human Resource issues directly.

Finally, OPSM have an infinitely scalable platform for growth. Technically, all that is needed to add a new branch is to commission the telecommunications, install a Cisco 800 router with the IOS VPN and included security software, connect the store to Auburn and they are on board.

Partners

When it came to selecting a partner for this large-scale project, Alex Chisholm stated that:

"Standardisation is the key to success," he said. "And so we insisted on Cisco technology in order to obtain a fully supported, proven architecture. OPSM is looking to emerge as a world-class company and so we need a world-class partner to provide our technology solution. We were also extremely aware of the need to select technology that

would be compatible and infinitely scalable. Cisco technology has already been deployed in other areas of our business and so we were very confident in the solution they proposed."

David Newton adds, "Cisco solutions are easy to manage and fully supported, which is an extremely important consideration in a rollout of this size and scope."

Steve Briscoe, Cisco Retail Account Manager, says: "OPSM clearly intends to provide customers with the ultimate retail experience. They

have a strong vision and commitment to succeed and they intend to leverage technology in order to obtain successful business outcomes."

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*David Newton,
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