

Lawn and Garden Leader Speeds WAN while Centralizing Servers

Scotts Miracle-Gro centralizes branch-office servers while speeding local operations using WAN acceleration solution

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE SCOTTS MIRACLE-GRO COMPANY

- Industry: Consumer Products (Lawn & Garden) and Retail (Patio & Garden)
- Location: Marysville, Ohio (Headquarters)
- Number of Employees: 5000+

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Reduce maintenance costs associated with remote file and print servers at branch offices
- Maintain LAN-like file and print services performance to branch users
- Ensure timely and properly managed backups of mission-critical data

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) to boost print and file services performance across the WAN while reducing bandwidth utilization

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Payback in less than 18 months through cost efficiencies of centralized data management
- Improved protection of mission-critical data with more effective backup procedures
- Increased capacity of bandwidth for future WAN needs
- Business agility to rapidly integrate acquired companies and deploy new branch offices

Business Challenge

The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company (NYSE: SMG) markets many noted consumer product brands in the lawn and garden industry—Scotts®, Miracle-Gro®, Ortho®, and Roundup®—and runs the market-leading patio and garden retailer, Smith & Hawken®.

The company's innovative products and strong business management have led to the healthy growth of a nearly \$7 billion global consumer market, and have multiplied sales to professional horticulturists.

To keep pace with market dynamics and maintain a position of readiness for further expansion and growth, Scotts Miracle-Gro relies on data center hosting and business process outsourcing services on its Cisco® product-based network from Affiliated Computer Services, Inc. (ACS), a premier provider of business and information technology solutions based in Dallas, Texas. ACS manages the two primary Scotts Miracle-Gro data centers in Marysville, Ohio and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

“Partnering with ACS and Cisco has helped us to build a strong IT infrastructure for our business,” says Larry Loeper, vice president of Global Business Information Systems at Scotts Miracle-Gro Company. “With these two IT partners, we can streamline business processes and drive improved cost efficiencies that will greatly enhance our competitive position globally.”

Recently, the company launched an initiative to consolidate branch servers to rein in operational costs for remote offices and to increase data integrity. With more than 500 remote office locations including 58 newly acquired Smith & Hawken retail stores, the support of remote file and print servers was becoming inefficient and costly.

Although Scotts Miracle-Gro and ACS could readily see the cost benefits of centralization, a large concern was performance degradation for users at the remote locations. Together they approached Cisco and several other vendors to propose solutions that could overcome the challenges of delivering file and print services over a WAN without performance decreases or additional bandwidth cost.

Network Solution

Scotts Miracle-Gro and ACS already had Cisco switches and routers in their networks, but they elected to evaluate six WAN optimization vendors as the market was new, with many innovative companies. The Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) solution scored high in the evaluations, which were based on the following four criteria:

- Reduced file transfer times—Measurements before and after the installation of the Cisco WAAS solution showed a ten-fold improvement in file transfer times from the data center file server to a remote location—from 60 seconds to six seconds. This proved the Cisco claim of delivering LAN-like performance over the WAN.
- Reduced printing times—Without the Cisco WAAS, branch employees complained about the excessive delays for printing documents as soon as the print servers were relocated into the data center. Yet, the Cisco WAAS restored printing times to the equivalent waits experienced when the branches had local print servers.
- Transparency—The Cisco WAAS applied acceleration and optimization techniques without impacting other network functions such as quality of service or security features.
- High availability—No additional points of failure were introduced, and any failure of the Cisco acceleration solution would not interrupt user services or applications; rather, un-accelerated operations continue unimpeded.

“The Cisco WAAS has proven to be an essential component for the success of our file and print server centralization initiative. Our remote branch employees are getting the same performance they had with local servers, while our operating expenses and data integrity have appreciably improved.”

—Bill Waszak, CIO, The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company

“After evaluating several options, we decided that Cisco’s products were best-equipped to deliver the innovation we were seeking to meet Scotts’ requirements,” says Tom Gibson of ACS Business Development. “The ability to centralize management and monitoring of data backup and storage enabled ACS to exceed the demanding service levels this client expected from their branch locations in Canada and the United States.”

Scotts Miracle-Gro and ACS were convinced that by eliminating the remote servers, support costs could be reduced and the efficiencies of centralized storage could be gained without any performance impact. As a result, established data integrity service level agreements (SLAs) could be more easily met due to centralized management and monitoring of data backup and storage.

The first Cisco WAAS solutions were deployed at the Pittsburgh data center location, at the Smith & Hawken headquarters in Novato, California, and Scotts Miracle-Gro’s first Canadian manufacturing facility in Delhi, Ontario. Five more locations were quickly equipped, and the current plan calls for rolling out Cisco WAAS to 40 company locations by June 2007. Success could lead to more geographically dispersed deployments in 2007, including Smith & Hawken retail and Scotts Lawn Service locations and joint sites with big box retailers.

“Cisco’s roadmap for the centralized data center aligns perfectly with our business targets,” says Bill Waszak, chief information officer for Scotts. “Cisco is going down the path of reducing the number of devices needed in the branch office without sacrificing application performance. This basic direction helps us control costs and is a great fit for our business model.”

Business Results

The selection of the Cisco WAAS solution has enabled Scotts Miracle-Gro to take full advantage of server and data center consolidation initiatives. As remote servers are moved back to the data center, Cisco WAAS appliances can be deployed at the branch offices that have high levels of WAN traffic that require acceleration.

The Cisco WAAS deployment paid for itself in 12 to 18 months through reduced service costs for the servers moved to the central data center. “This simplified model is more efficient and saves the client money that would be better allocated to other priorities,” says Gibson of ACS. “Rather, with the centralized servers and Cisco acceleration solution, the data center team can easily swap out failed drives without service calls to disk repair companies.”

Scotts Miracle-Gro and ACS have realized many additional and unforeseen benefits from the Cisco WAAS solution that were not originally drivers of the branch server consolidation project such as:

- Ease of regulatory compliance—Consolidated data and centralized data management procedures are more easily verified and monitored to comply with governance regulations.
- Integration of acquisitions—The Smith & Hawken acquisition allowed the Scotts Miracle-Gro Company and ACS to test the procedures for merging office locations into the existing their infrastructure and prove that with the consolidated data center and the centralized data management in place, any future acquisitions could be rapidly integrated with a “cookie-cutter” deployment involving file system redirection and local acceleration.
- Increased employee productivity—Cisco WAAS improves the performance over the WAN of the company’s business applications such as Microsoft Exchange, SAP, Manugistics, PowerCenter, John Galt Solutions, and custom applications delivered to branch users through Citrix.
- Reduced footprint in the branch—With the recent release of a Cisco WAAS solution that runs on a module inserted into the Cisco Integrated Services Router, further cost improvements can be achieved by maintaining a smaller branch IT footprint.
- Bandwidth reallocation—Since the Cisco WAAS minimizes bandwidth utilization for file and print services over the WAN, The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company now has unused bandwidth capacity for as yet unforeseen uses.

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PRODUCT LIST

Cisco Application Networking Services:

- Cisco Wide Area Application Engine (WAE) Appliances
- Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) Software

Next Steps

With the Cisco WAAS in place, Scotts Miracle-Gro first plans to further explore the potential benefits of acceleration of existing business applications and deployment at selected European locations. Second, Scotts Miracle-Gro and ACS are exploring the relocation of LDAP servers into the data center. And third, the Cisco WAAS solution supports the business growth of the company by providing confidence that integration of additional locations will be seamless.

“Many of our clients, like Scotts Miracle-Gro, are moving to centralized storage models,” states Tom Gibson at ACS. “We are very excited about the results we’ve achieved with the Cisco application acceleration solutions. And based on this success, we definitely plan to offer new managed services based on this technology that can reduce our operating costs, and thus can pass the savings on to our clients.”

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco WAAS and Cisco Application Networking Services, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/hw/contnetw/index.html>.



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