WE

Empowering people through employment

With the lofty mission to use the profits from their retail thrift stores to provide training, employment and support services for people with disabilities or disadvantages, the Goodwill organization in Virginia is a multi-faceted enterprise. But when a limited, single-threaded MPLS connection and constant network outages threatened to derail their operations, new solutions were needed to continue providing power to the people.

At a glance

Goodwill
Central and Coastal Virginia

Industry

Non-profit retail, training and employment

Customer

39 locations

1,300 employees

Challenges

Limited bandwidth

Lack of resiliency

High costs

Solutions

SD-WAN Concierge™

Dual broadband connections

Cloud Connect

MNS Cloud

Dynamic IP voice

Results

Expanded bandwidth

Improved resiliency

Reduced network outages

Enhanced application performance

Reduced costs

Removing barriers to success

To say Goodwill of Central and Coastal Virginia has a lot going on is an understatement. John Leopold, VP of Enterprise Support for the organization, explains their mission as a multi-pronged approach to removing barriers. First, they are a large retail operation that sells donated items at their 36 stores. Next, they operate Career Employment Centers. Their Ability One program wins government contracts for employment in the janitorial and facilities management sector, which they fill with eager job seekers looking for a hand up, not a handout. Finally, they are a training and support hub that provides pathways to employment—at their stores, through their employment contracts, and at their regional offices—for those with barriers to employment.

The challenge for such a wide-reaching organization is to keep all their locations, including those with point of sale (POS) systems, time clock systems, video security and alarm systems, job training classrooms and traditional offices up and running at acceptable speeds. A single-threaded MPLS network connection just wasn't cutting it. Frequent heavy traffic and "bandwidth starvation" meant unreliable service and outages across the network, resulting in lost sales, missed revenue, theft of products and no room for growth.

"Our network was suffering from bandwidth starvation. Performance of apps was lacking, and we were unable to support our innovation plans."

John Leopold
VP Enterprise Support

To address their needs with their limited non-profit budget, Leopold first looked at expanding their MPLS network to handle a heavier load. As expected, the solution was far too costly to implement, which led to his investigation of SD-WAN solutions from Windstream Enterprise.

"We looked at implementing SD-WAN Concierge with dual broadband connections in an active/passive configuration to replace our legacy T1 MPLS that had high bandwidth broadband and a 4G Cellular broadband as the backup," says Leopold. "I found the Windstream solution affordable, especially when compared to adding bandwidth to our old system."

Putting IT to work

Windstream Enterprise replaced the MPLS network across 36 retail locations, as well as primary and secondary headquarter locations and a community employment center. The SD-WAN Concierge solution and dual broadband circuits help protect business-critical applications against outages. Many mission-critical apps were moved from their headquarters to cloud service provider, Azure, and Windstream Enterprise Cloud Connect was added for reliable and high-performance connectivity to these apps.

The result gave Goodwill ample bandwidth to keep their existing apps running at peak performance while enabling many new apps. For example, they've now employed new distance learning via video that wouldn't have been possible with the previous MPLS network. However, at the end of the day, Leopold is most impressed with the resiliency, reporting and cost savings.

"Network outages are extremely rare, and the WE Connect portal allows my IT team to proactively monitor the system. I was impressed the upgrade led to cost savings. SD-WAN is surprisingly affordable," he says. "We can spend more time on projects that help grow the business and improve processes, instead of constantly firefighting."

Training for the future

Managed Network Security (MNS) Cloud continues to provide network security for Goodwill. Newly increased bandwidth allowed the remote VPN capabilities to support record numbers of employees working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

And while Dynamic IP continues to provide the organization's telephone services, Leopold reports that an eventual migration to a Windstream Enterprise Unified Communications solution (UCaaS) is a future roadmap item.

"The people at Windstream Enterprise are the secret sauce. I have trust in what they tell me, they continue to advocate for Goodwill, and they hold themselves accountable," Leopold adds. "Plus, their customer service has made our experience excellent."

Cloud-enabled connectivity, communications and security—guaranteed.

"The Windstream Enterprise solution has delivered the bandwidth and performance we need to efficiently run our business. And the accountability and responsiveness of the support team has been excellent."

John Leopold
VP Enterprise Support

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