

After a meticulous examination of the existing network, and discussions to understand their business operation requirements and goals, HiLink's consulting engineers devised a Cisco VPN Wide Area Secure Network Foundation for MMCC. With the blueprint in hand, Hi-Link's consulting engineers sat down with Bellnier and showed him how Cisco's secure network foundation works together to proactively monitor the system and alert them with any issues. The network is designed to give Bellnier control and transparent remote access to all needed devices, and at the same time, routine maintenance is automated so Bellnier is not overburdened. These features make the network a popular solution for Hi-Link's SMB customers.

"We have always been very focused on the SMB market," says Jim Gartner, business development manager for Hi-Link. "And the Cisco SMB Select program, along with our Cisco Premier Partner certification, has made it our primary revenue source. With help from Cisco, we have put on SMB seminars and participated in the Cisco Now Van when it came to our area. Both were very successful in helping us reach out to the SMB community."

It is important to know and understand the needs of SMB customers in order to help them be successful, according to Gartner.

"First of all, in a small business you have people wearing multiple hats in the company, so they usually have a number of different things to worry about," he says. "The head of IT often does not have a team working under him or her. And it is really difficult for a small business to have a network down when it is trying to generate revenue and increase business."

Hi-Link concentrates on working closely with each SMB client, building a good working relationship so that the client feels comfortable.

"Our sales reps and engineers do a great job of showing their expertise and gaining that confidence and trust," says Gartner. "We work closely with the client to understand the company's network and business needs, and then put together a viable solution. If their business will suffer from going down as we install their new network, we will work after hours."

A New Metric for Network Performance: ROI

MMCC's new Cisco solution is already logging a yearly savings of more than \$77,000, and return on investment (ROI) took place in just six months—all this while providing better performance.

"I did the math, and the managed system cost us \$11,000 a month," says Bellnier. "Our new network costs less than half that for the T1 lines that we need."

Bellnier says that the new network's reliability is one of its greatest benefits. MMCC no longer suffers through network outages that stretch for days, and built-in redundancy helps ensure that they will never happen. He noticed immediately that users have far less to complain about.

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is good. And if there is a problem, now I can get it addressed and the system back up within an hour." Bellnier chose to contract with Hi-Link and pre-purchase hours of support, so that if a problem arises that happens to be beyond his scope, Hi-Link is always available.

"But I need them less and less," says Bellnier. "I just do not have the traumas that I used to have. When there is a problem, I figure out what it is and I fix it. I am the customer, so I get the respect and leverage I deserve, and I have an answer for management right away."

Having evolved the network to the next phase, Bellnier is now equipping all offices with wireless capability. As MMCC and Hi-Link move forward with the wireless project, Bellnier has advice for IT managers in SMB organizations who are looking to make the switch to a self-managed network.

"Do not limit company expansion by thinking you cannot support or afford a self-managed system with limited resources—with Hi-Link as our partner, we were able to show management how quickly we could recoup the cost, and implement a self-managed system with far superior performance and a lot fewer problems," he says. "Make your solution Cisco end-to-end. It eliminates finger pointing, and if you run into problems, you deal with Cisco service, which is absolutely fabulous. They stick with you until it is resolved. Even when we had trouble dealing with our telco, Cisco got involved and helped us."

It is all in a day's work for Gartner and the Hi-Link team, who are busy responding to what they see as an increase in IT spending.

"Technology is getting older—five or six years ago there was a buildup, and that technology is now on the edge of being obsolete. We see increased interest in the SMB community for wireless, IP, and security solutions," says Gartner. "With support from Cisco, we are really connecting with that community and helping them with real solutions that can drive their business."

This customer story is based on information provided by MMCC and describes how that particular organization benefits from the deployment of Cisco products. Many factors may have contributed to the results and benefits described; Cisco does not guarantee comparable results elsewhere.

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