MORE BANDWIDTH FOR SWISS INSURANCE COMPANY: CSS GROUP EMPLOYS HIGH-PERFORMANCE SWITCHES

Summary

Company: CSS Versicherung AG

Industry: Insurance

Challenge(s):

- Upgrade the network to add more bandwidth to the system
- Complete the upgrade within one weekend
- Create a highly available, flexible, and cost efficient network

Selection Criteria: After rejecting the proposal from its incumbent infrastructure vendor, CSS Group evaluated Juniper Networks and found that its solution was a much better fit and also more cost-effective

Network Solution:

- Juniper Networks EX Series Ethernet Switches
- Juniper Networks SRX Series Services Gateways
- Juniper Networks NSM3000

Results:

- Increased network simplicity using equipment running on the Juniper Networks Junos operating system
- Increased bandwidth to 10 Gbps and made adding more bandwidth to the system easy
- Ensured good customer service with Juniper and InfoGuard as local partner

CSS Group is a long established, well respected insurance corporation with a heritage spanning more than one hundred years. Established in 1899, CSS Group is the largest provider of general insurance in Switzerland, and also provides specialist health and accident insurance. Headquartered in Lucerne, the cultural and economic center of central Switzerland, CSS Group employs over 2,500 people and has a total of 1.74 million customers.

In a fast changing market environment, the willingness of people to change insurance providers is rising. CSS Group has gradually become the market leader, thanks in large part to its excellent customer service. To ensure that CSS is well positioned to meet the needs of its customers, the organization has 120 agencies throughout Switzerland. With this presence, CSS Group can stay close to its core belief of delivering excellent customer service through personal and confidential consulting within a trusted environment.

CSS Group prides itself on its tradition and pedigree, but is also conscious of the need to remain extremely agile in order to meet clients' expectations. IT infrastructure is one of the most important requirements for running business smoothly, especially at an insurance company. Customers' personal data has to be protected against loss and malicious attacks. The CSS maximizes security with two data centers, each with a total of 700 servers, which jointly provide a redundant infrastructure.

Backup Bottleneck

"Our need for bandwidth is constantly growing," says Yves Lustenberger, Head of Networks and Technical Security at CSS. He has been especially concerned about the backup process as data is mirrored between CSS' data centers at night, and this means that bandwidth is crucial. The backup has to be complete by the time the first employees start work in the morning. If not, the backup will interfere with daily business. For Lustenberger, this is not an option, as approximately 1,500 employees access centrally saved data from their desks on a daily basis.

In 2010, it became clear that the infrastructure had to be extended before lack of bandwidth became an issue. "Although our network had an overall performance of about four gigabits, the servers were only able to communicate with each other at a speed of one gigabit per second. That was definitely not enough," explains Lustenberger. Since it was not possible to speed up the network with the existing hardware, the CSS Group decided to invest in new Layer 3 switches and firewalls to reach a bandwidth of 10 Gbps.

Incumbent Supplier Fails to Meet Needs

The network at CSS was originally built on a competitor's components. "We thought it an obvious choice to continue with the incumbent supplier," Lustenberger recalls. He was satisfied with the hardware and his colleagues were familiar with the handling. A change of supplier would surely cause problems and employees would have to be trained on a new system. But the situation changed when the proposal came through. "The price was just a shock for me." the IT specialist says.

CSS decided it was time to broaden the search. "Our existing supplier wanted to sell us a solution that didn't fit our needs," Lustenberger explains. "The proposal they presented was not a fit for our insurance business, and was too expensive for us." It was clear Lustenberger had to find an alternative. As CSS was using firewalls from Juniper Networks already, it was an easy decision to take a closer look at Juniper's switch portfolio as well. "We knew Juniper, but not their Layer 3 switches," the IT chief says. "When I got the offer from Juniper, I was shocked for the second time. Not only did the proposal fit our business need, the price was extremely competitive."

> "We are more than satisfied with the result. The network runs without a problem since the project has been completed. By choosing Juniper components as well as the operating system, we are able to easily add further bandwidth to our network which provides further investment security to our system."
>
> - Yves Lustenberger,
>   Head of Networks and Technical Security, CSS Group

Meticulous Planning for the Network Upgrade

Lustenberger was initially concerned that changing supplier might be difficult, "We tried to get a feeling for the components and their handling in workshops." he says. In a laboratory setup, Lustenberger and his colleagues tested the switches with painstaking care. It quickly became clear that the change to Juniper would be a good decision and easy transition. CSS chose to deploy devices from the Juniper Networks® EX2200, EX4200, and EX4500 lines of Ethernet switches, as well as the Juniper Networks SRX3600 Services Gateway and NSM3000 appliance. This combination provided the exact solution needed to meet its needs. Not only was it cost efficient, it also provided excellent performance management, scalability for future upgrades, and ongoing investment protection.

Results

Lustenberger and his colleagues took three months to plan the transition to Juniper Networks. Supported by Juniper and its partner InfoGuard, the transition was completed within a single weekend. Within two weeks, the CSS engineers were confident and comfortable with the system and found it easy to administer. "We are more than satisfied with the results," Lustenberger now says, more than a year after the changeover. "We faced some challenges not unique to such a big project, but these were managed well and the network runs without issue." Lustenberger says that he is delighted with the outcome.

Security for the Future

Operability and price were not the only drivers of this change. "Investment security also plays an important role," Lustenberger says. The network is not yet at its limits, but CSS will need more bandwidth in future. "Then, we can easily scale and buy more performance without having to change operating systems and platforms."

Next Steps and Lessons Learned

Lustenberger is confident he will continue to work with Juniper. The combination of good service by the supplier and its partner, who is based in Switzerland, has convinced him that he made the best decision. With everything running smoothly, it's easy to underestimate the IT department's efforts, especially as the nightly backup no longer causes the business any issue.

For More Information

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