

AMICA TAKES OUT NETWORK INSURANCE POLICY ON VOIP WITH J SERIES SERVICES ROUTERS

Summary

Industry: Insurance

Challenges:

- Redevelop corporate network to enable VoIP while accommodating data traffic for 1500 employees in 40 locations
- Ensure high quality of service levels over an MPLS network
- Increase router capabilities to handle future growth

Network Solution: Juniper Networks J Series Services Routers

Results:

- Return on investment in less than one year
- Reduced operations costs with easy management
- Convergence of voice and data over the same network with business-quality telecommunications

For 100 years, Amica Mutual Insurance Company, the oldest mutual auto insurer in the United States, has offered a variety of services to its policyholders, including auto, home, and life insurance. In fact, Amica wrote its first automobile insurance policy in 1907, when cars were a novel form of transportation.

Since those early days Amica has set itself apart from other insurance firms by forgoing the traditional model of selling policies through agents. Instead, the company deals directly with customers, which results in lower costs and a higher level of personal service.

Now, Amica is keeping up with the times by making sure its enterprise IT infrastructure can handle its growing number of offices and customers.

Challenges

For Amica, with its 39 branch offices around the U.S. and headquarters in Lincoln, Rhode Island, the corporate network is key to keeping in touch with employees and customers. “We’re a direct writer of insurance, which means we don’t have agents like most insurance companies,” said Ron Rivet, network operations section manager for Amica. “Each branch is responsible for customers in their region.”

Amica planned to migrate to VoIP, which would allow its 1500 employees to provide better service to customers and enable the company to reap the savings on long-distance calls associated with IP telephony.

Amica knew it needed to make some changes to its network architecture to support the demands of voice and data on a converged network. It needed to support its VoIP-based call center application and IP phone system, as well as a growing number of other business applications. As testing began on Amica’s chosen VoIP solution over both its MPLS network and T-1 WAN, issues with voice quality occurred, according to Rivet.

“We could run 45 or 50 voice calls with no problem, or we could run a full set of data, but when we mixed the two together, the router just wouldn’t handle it,” Rivet recalled.

The source of the trouble was elusive. “We didn’t have the issue over the private line network, which indicated that the problem was on the MPLS side,” Rivet said. “We banged our heads against the wall looking at quality of service, class of service, and routing parameters with our MPLS network.”

When Rivet and his team still couldn’t pinpoint the problem in the MPLS network, all roads led to the network equipment. After identifying a throughput problem on the routers, they worked closely with the incumbent router vendor. After intense effort, it was clear that the existing routers, although less than three years old, couldn’t support the demands of voice. “Finally,” Rivet said, “the vendor acknowledged there was an issue and recommended we buy their newest routers for our branch offices.”



Selection Criteria

Faced with a purchase decision, Rivet began his due diligence. He created a short list, with the incumbent router vendor and Juniper Networks® at the top. Rivet was familiar with the high quality, performance, and security of Juniper Network solutions, as Amica is a long-standing user of Juniper Networks secure networking solutions.

Rivet did a head-to-head comparison of the two routers. With performance on par, the demands of ongoing operations and security came into play. Rivet's staff much preferred the Juniper Networks J Series Services Router, because they were easier to manage and provided comprehensive security for VoIP, which would result in reduced operation costs and minimize risks.

"Our staff liked the graphical user interface and the command line interface on the Juniper routers better," he said, adding that his team became adept at configuring and managing the Juniper Networks routers in just two days.

"We are able to run a higher level of data along with voice calls, which we simply couldn't do before."

Ron Rivet
Network Operations Section Manager,
Amica Mutual Insurance Company

Solution

"When it comes down to an IT buying decision, it's not all about the money. It's about what product we believe will deliver the best value for what we're trying to do," Rivet said. In the end, Amica selected J Series routers for their unmatched performance, reliability, and ease of management.

The J Series meets the demands of voice applications and maintains robust application performance under load and when security services are enabled. In addition, the J Series offers VoIP-specific denial-of-service protection by allowing customers to limit call setup to protect against unwanted calls and misuse of the network.

Amica rolled out 60 Juniper Networks J2300 Services Routers to 39 branch offices in a month.

J Series Services Routers are designed to provide secure reliable connectivity to remote, branch, and regional offices. They run the modular Juniper Networks Junos® operating system, which offers advanced services such as MPLS and quality of service (QoS). The routers also provide stateful firewall and IPsec VPN security services.

Results

According to Rivet, the J Series deployment has enabled Amica to move forward with its business plan to deploy VoIP over a converged network. "We can run a higher level of data along with voice calls, which we simply couldn't do before," he said.

Amica achieved a return on its investment in less than a year, according to Rivet. "VoIP will eliminate some of our long-distance costs. In terms of cost savings, VoIP is definitely to our advantage." He added that managing the Juniper Networks routers has been very easy.

In terms of customer satisfaction, Rivet said his goal is for customers to have no idea that Amica has changed its phone system at all. "Amica's hallmark is customer service. We have consistently won awards for our customer service," he said. "The Juniper Networks routers enable us to continue to deliver on that expectation of outstanding customer service."

Next Steps and Lessons Learned

Now that Amica has resolved the throughput and QoS issues with its VoIP deployment, it plans to add additional layers of security using the Juniper Networks IDP Series Intrusion Detection and Prevention Appliances and firewall products already installed on the network.

Rivet added that Amica's employees are the beneficiaries of this network "insurance policy."

"My customers are our employees, and this solution doesn't interrupt their workday and allows them to get their jobs done," he said. "They have a new phone on their desk, but other than that they won't notice any difference with VoIP."

About Juniper Networks

Juniper Networks, Inc. is the leader in high-performance networking. Juniper offers a high-performance network infrastructure that creates a responsive and trusted environment for accelerating the deployment of services and applications over a single network. This fuels high-performance businesses. Additional information can be found at www.juniper.net.

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