LA POSTE—A CUSTOMER SERVICES SUCCESS STUDY

Summary

Industry: Postal Mail, Financial Services, Logistics

Challenges:

- Complex networking environment of 20,000 routers and switches.

- Traffic is primarily time sensitive financial transactions, so service interruptions are not acceptable.

Network Solutions:

- Juniper Networks Service Manager for case coordination, high-level communications, and oversight.

- Reports and consulting enable proactive prevention and informed decision making.

Results:

- LaPoste enjoys effective management of today's network, and expert planning and design for tomorrow's network.

- Proactive services from Juniper Networks evaluate the environment continuously to ensure that nothing takes La Poste by surprise.

- Juniper consulting services provide valuable insights regarding network topology and architectural design, IT standards, and industry best practices.

- Juniper support engineers work closely with BT Services engineers to ensure rapid resolution of problems when they occur.

La Poste is one of the largest companies in France, responsible for all postal operations as well as being a major consumer bank. Operating out of 17,000 distinct sites with over 300,000 employees, one-third directly involved in mail delivery, La Poste has enormous IT and networking requirements. La Poste has created several internal departments responsible for different aspects of its complex IT and networking environment. Responsibility for developing and managing the wide area network lies with the DISIT (Direction de l'Ingénierie des Systèmes d'Information et des Télécommunications). Onsite deployment, configuration, and maintenance are handled by a separate, although closely aligned, operation called the DSEM (Direction du Support et de la Maintenance). "Although we are La Poste's internal operator, that does not mean we have a monopoly on providing network services to the organization," says Didier Guillemot, DISIT Division Manager for Architecture and Security. "Every year La Poste benchmarks us against external suppliers. If we aren't competitive on measures such as cost per managed port, cost per email box, and cost per mobile worker, we are out the door. And if the network ever fails, we will be gone."

Challenges

La Poste's networking environment includes 20,000 routers and switches, a number of which are from Juniper Networks®. The backbone runs on fully redundant Juniper Networks M Series Multiservice Edge Routers and MX Series 3D Universal Edge Routers interconnected via high-speed links from two operators (for redundancy) in a full mesh MPLS-VPN environment. Much of La Poste's headquarters location and data centers are served by Juniper Networks EX Series Ethernet Switches. Other Juniper Networks equipment includes the Juniper Networks SRX Series Services Gateways and NetScreen Series Security Systems.

Although the network does not transport excessively high volumes of traffic, the traffic that is transported is mostly time sensitive financial transactions, so service interruptions are not acceptable. To ensure that this complex network environment functions at the highest possible level, La Poste requires top quality services in three areas—operational support, proactive prevention, and design assistance. By subscribing to specific Juniper Networks offerings, La Poste has been able to receive the support it requires: an assigned Juniper Networks Service Manager who is in regular communication, a support team, and, when necessary, Juniper proactive services consulting engineers.

Solution

Operational Support

La Poste has a very good working relationship with its network integrator, BT Services, which is a Juniper Networks Operate Specialist partner. Due to the sheer size of the network, there are often a number of cases active simultaneously, the vast majority having a low priority level (Priority 3 or 4). These normal maintenance issues are handled by the support teams of BT Services, who are fully trained in Juniper's products and are able to provide full diagnostics, repair, and parts replacement as needed. When issues become particularly complex, Juniper support engineers work closely with BT engineers to ensure rapid resolution of problems. The assigned Juniper Service Manager provides extensive information on case activity, volumes, trends, and resolutions. The Service Manager is also the point of escalation for higher priority issues, acting as La Poste's advocate within Juniper Networks to ensure that the right level of urgency is recognized at the appropriate levels of the organization. For escalated cases, the Service Manager makes sure that the partner and Juniper engineers are well coordinated, provides status updates to the customer and the partner, and does appropriate follow-up once the case is resolved, detailing what happened and what Juniper did to resolve the issue.

An important part of the Service Manager's role is to work closely with pre- and post-sales engineers to keep La Poste informed about the availability of new features, capabilities, or products that might be useful in its network going forward. The Service Manager can also propose education and certification programs for La Poste's technicians and engineers that may help La Poste get even more out of its Juniper Networks solutions. The Service Manager has a working relationship with the operational and planning teams of La Poste and BT Services, and is the focal point of the day-to-day relationship between La Poste and Juniper Networks. In addition to constant communication on high-priority cases, these key players have a scheduled telephone conference call every two weeks, and a face-to-face meeting every quarter. These meetings allow all three parties to review current situations, plan upcoming activities such as moves, upgrades, changes, or new projects, and make sure that all sides are aware of anything that might affect the smooth operations of La Poste's networks—in short, working as a close-knit team with a common purpose. "The detailed information we receive from the Juniper Service Manager can be almost used 'as-is' for the management dashboard we provide to our client," according to Didier Guillemot at DISIT.

Proactive Prevention

La Poste's businesses rely on the effective working of the network, and the DISIT and DSEM teams put the highest possible priority on keeping the network up and running. In parallel to the production network, they have put in place an extensive validation network where anything new in the network, whether software upgrades, new features, or new products, receives a prolonged period of testing under conditions approaching normal production situations, but risk free. From the point of view of the DISIT, the validation network is just as crucial as the production network, and receives as much attention and priority. For this reason, La Poste has subscribed to a set of proactive services from Juniper Networks to ensure that nothing takes them by surprise.

For example, La Poste regularly receives Product Issue Impact Reports (PIIRs), a service that analyzes the software and hardware levels of equipment in the network and points out problems that are at risk of occurring. For the security equipment, the engineers provide early access to SIRT (Security Incident Response Team) reports so that La Poste can upgrade its security equipment and procedures before issues even become public. "Often our operational management team hears about security issues in the media, so getting these SIRT reports in advance means we are often able to tell them the issue has already been taken care of. Even though we are smaller than a major outsourcer, this shows our management that we are more flexible and can provide the level of service necessary," says Didier Guillemot.

Guillemot is convinced of the necessity of proactive support services: "I cannot imagine a support contract without proactive services. It gives us the technical information we need to be ahead of the game. We are able to immediately answer the questions our management asks us. We didn't have that before, so working with Juniper has enabled us to 'up our game'."

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>
> Didier Guillemot,
> DISIT Division Manager for Architecture and Security

Design Assistance

La Poste is active in three highly competitive markets: finance, postal mails, and logistics. In order to stay ahead, it must constantly innovate, creating new products and services for its customers. The IT and networking organizations cannot be content to follow. They must anticipate the needs of the business and be ready with the architectures necessary to support them. This is why design assistance is the third pillar in the strong relationship between La Poste and Juniper Networks.

La Poste's DISIT organization frequently engages Juniper consultants and engineers for design assistance. This can take a variety of forms. In many cases, there are specific questions about network topology or architecture, such as what would be the best protocols to use for different services, consideration on specific hardware, or software levels in the network. In the case of a multicast project, for example, Juniper engineers set up two possible implementations side by side, allowing La Poste's technicians and engineers to see the advantages and disadvantages of each. This workshop was organized by the Juniper Networks Service Manager and allowed La Poste to make a truly informed decision as to the best implementation for them.

Another purpose of La Poste's engagements with Juniper consultants is to get their opinions on technical standards or IT processes in the market. The technical management team of La Poste believes that following standards is very important to the long-term viability of their network. In order to stay ahead of the technology curve, they must anticipate which standards are most likely to win out over time, because a major project will have a life of at least five years: one year to put it in place, three years in production, and a final year of evolution. Juniper Networks consultants, who have worked closely with La Poste and who understand the environment, are able to give the technical teams valuable information as to what is being done by other customers, by other vendors, and the directions in which Juniper itself is heading, both in terms of standards supported and product evolution. "We absolutely need the highest possible level of information," says Didier Cadiou, DISIT Division Manager for Validation and Testing, "and with Juniper we have in front of us people of extremely high quality."

Results

The management team of La Poste is very demanding of its IT organization. IT must constantly be prepared to justify itself against the risk of being outsourced. The DISIT networking department has risen to this challenge through a close partnership with its integration partner BT Services and with with Juniper's customer services organization. Didier Cadiou characterizes it as "a complete transparency and openness with Juniper and our partner BT."

The keystone to this relationship has been the Service Manager, who coordinates putting the right resources in front of La Poste at the right time, and providing a mass of details on the day-to-day relationship between Juniper and La Poste. Didier Guillemot comments: "This is the first time we have ever had such an overview of all the issues across the entire network, and we have seen a strong evolution towards overall improvement. We have never had that with any other vendor before."

Next Steps and Lessons Learned

La Poste continues to innovate and expand its network. Each evolution is coordinated with Juniper's Service Manager and proactive consulting engineers. As La Poste starts to look at new standards such as IPv6, it relies on Juniper's engineers to provide it not only with roadmaps of our product plans, but feedback on what we are seeing in the marketplace. "I always talk with two Juniper engineers," says Didier Guillemot, "it ensures I have a complete view of the situation."

For More Information

To find out more about Juniper Networks products and solutions, visit **http://www.juniper.net**. To find out more about the technical services available from Juniper Networks, visit **www.juniper.net/us/en/products-services/technical-services/**.

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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