Network Upgrade by RSI Is Pure Gold for Hecla Mining

Summary

Company:

Hecla Mining Company

Industry:

Mining

Business Challenge:

· Interoperability with acquired companies bogged down existing 1GbE network and increased IT administration needs.

· Diverse networking environment drove complicated IOS commands.

· Disaster recovery setup needed to cover acquired technology.

Solution Provider:

· Right! Systems Inc. (RSI)

Technology Solution:

· 10GbE Juniper network, including these EX Series Ethernet Switches:

  – EX4550 Ethernet Switch

  – EX4200 Ethernet Switch

  – EX2200-C Ethernet Switch

Business Results:

· 10GbE network positions company for future growth; faster, easier interoperability with acquired companies.

· Total disaster recovery delivers business continuity confidence.

· Network expanded to underground mining facilities boosts employee productivity.

· Simplified administration frees up technology staff for more strategic projects.

Hecla Mining Company was established in 1891 and today is the largest primary silver producer in the U.S., and one of the lowest cost producers. With headquarters in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, it is also a growing low-cost gold producer, and the company has a number of exploration properties. As a leader in environmental practices in the industry, the company prides itself on its responsible mining practices, making safety and environmental stewardship cornerstones of its corporate culture.

In preparation for a significant mining operation acquisition in Northern Québec, Hecla asked its technology integrator and solution provider partner Right! Systems, Inc. (RSI) to conduct a strategic planning and technology roadmap assessment.

"We are a lean IT staff, wearing a substantial number of hats due to the size of our company and the number of users we support," said Mike Patton, director of Information Technology at Hecla. "We simply can't appropriately research all of the technology available. We really depended on RSI to review our current setup, the IT infrastructure of Aurizon, the company we were acquiring, and then make a recommendation that would enable us to move forward quickly and efficiently with integrating our systems."

Founded in 1993, Right! Systems focuses on providing world-class IT solutions that help its customers manage costs, people, and processes. Its collaborative effort allows for seamless technology integration to meet the needs of its clients—no matter how quickly the company is growing or how fast its market is changing. With six offices located throughout the Pacific Northwest, businesses from SMBs to enterprises depend on RSI to solve their pain points and help them grow.

Business Challenge

With Hecla's planned acquisition increasing the number of computer users by 50 percent, RSI conducted a comprehensive review of existing technology at both companies. It also reviewed Hecla's growth plans to ensure that technology recommendations would align with future needs.

"Because we grow in bits and pieces, it's much more logical that as we grow, we keep our IT familiar and stable," said Patton. "Otherwise we would end up forklifting the entire system every time we do something new. RSI is invaluable in helping us stay with this model. They review current and acquired technology and enable us to stay on a steady technology course."

RSI found that the sizable acquisition being planned would overwhelm nearly every component of Hecla's current network.

"The acquisition planned by Hecla would overwhelm one system into the next and create a domino effect," said Sean Padget, executive vice president, sales and marketing for RSI. "The previous network setup limited them to a 1GbE solution and would have caused enormously difficult administration issues. We recommended upgrading to a 10GbE network that would support seamless interoperability, while putting the company in the best possible position to handle future acquisitions and growth."

"With common platforms across all major sites, we definitely notice a difference. We have repeatability and predictability at each site, which drives our efficiency. We are spending much less time on administrative and troubleshooting issues. This frees up staff to devote more time to strategic initiatives for the business."

Mike Patton, Director of IT, Hecla

Technology Solution

RSI recommended that Hecla modernize and refresh its core network, virtual environment, and backup at its corporate, Aurizon Val-d'Or, and Aurizon Casa Berardi sites. It also drove a complete refresh of the company's disaster recovery center to ensure flawless business continuity. RSI advised upgrading to a 10GbE network using Juniper Networks® EX4550 and EX4200 Ethernet Switches, which would provide improved performance over its current legacy solution.

The EX4550 Ethernet Switch provides high-density 10GbE ports for aggregation layers and data center top-of-rack deployments, and offers options for data center optimized airflow. The EX4200 Ethernet Switch is a compact, fixed-configuration access and aggregation solution that deploys easily in top-of-rack or end-of-row data center configurations or campus installations. Juniper's Virtual Chassis technology can be used to connect multiple Juniper switches in a single, logical device. This delivers a scalable solution that is perfect for growing business campus installations such as Hecla's.

Hecla IT director Mike Patton was ready to put RSI's recommendations into action. He was anxious to get rid of the legacy networking equipment in place at the company, due to both poor overall support by its vendor and a maintenance program that was costly and difficult to manage.

By implementing RSI's recommendations for a new Juniper Networks solution, employees from the acquired company would be integrated with Hecla immediately, making them feel part of the team and Hecla culture—a critical piece of a successful acquisition. Additionally, upgrading to a 10GbE solution would support the company's future growth, making subsequent acquisitions smooth and efficient.

Business Results

The deployment itself was seamless, thanks to RSI engineers working hand-in-hand with Hecla IT staff and facilitating training on the new network and the Juniper Networks Junos® operating system.

"We had a half-dozen major manufacturers to coordinate with, which normally would be a huge implementation headache," said Patton. "Thanks to RSI and our internal network administration staff, it was very straightforward. For instance, RSI leveraged the good synergy between Juniper and Nimble Storage. There was also some very sophisticated integration that only a knowledgeable integrator such as RSI could pull off. This is the kind of expertise we really depend on them for, and they come through every time."

RSI worked side-by-side with Hecla IT deploying the new 10GbE network, and today Patton and his IT team are supporting more than 625 users. The IT staff was dealing with a relatively diverse environment with the previous network, requiring different IOS versions with different commands for various products. The new solution provides a unified approach with Junos operating system running across all products. The Hecla IT staff has found it very easy to learn Junos OS, and then apply the same commands to all parts of the network.

Additionally, RSI's use of the compact, fanless Juniper Networks EX2200-C Ethernet Switch has enabled Hecla to expand its network into underground mines. Now employees working in the mines can log onto the network and be more productive onsite. The upgrade to the company's disaster recovery site means that the IT group literally flips a switch to go live with critical services, providing total confidence in business continuity. The network upgrade engineered by RSI has been so successful that Hecla has just completed the expansion of the solution to a fifth site.

"With common platforms across all major sites, we definitely notice a difference," notes Patton. "We have repeatability and predictability at each site, which drives our efficiency. We are spending much less time on administrative and troubleshooting issues. This frees up staff to devote more time to strategic initiatives for the business."

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Mike Patton, Director of IT, Hecla

Next Steps

As things change and the business evolves, Hecla and RSI will continue to work together to fine-tune technology solutions while putting the company in the best possible position to handle future acquisitions and growth.

For More Information

To find out more about Juniper Networks products and solutions, please visit www.juniper.net.

About Right! Systems, Inc.

Right! Systems Inc.—a member of the M7 Group of companies—is one of North America's leading technology services companies providing a range of offerings, including consulting, integration, procurement and support services. In its 20+ years in business, the company has solidified itself as the go-to provider of IT services—its unique and all-encompassing approach includes in-depth collaboration, insightful analysis and industry-specific counsel on strategy, best practices, technology and management.

About Juniper Networks

Juniper Networks is in the business of network innovation. From devices to data centers, from consumers to cloud providers, Juniper Networks delivers the software, silicon, and systems that transform the experience and economics of networking. The company serves customers and partners worldwide. Additional information can be found at www.juniper.net.

3530021-001-EN Dec 2014

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