

SCHUIITEMA IMPROVES SUPERMARKET OPERATIONS WITH CISCO NETWORK

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Mischa Deden, IT Project Manager,
Schuitema

Schuitema uses its end-to-end Cisco network to streamline its business operations and maximize network reliability and performance for its independent retailers throughout the Netherlands.

BACKGROUND

Based in the Netherlands, Schuitema is a holding group that operates a variety of supermarket chains and food distribution companies. The company’s most prominent brand, C1000, is the leading and fastest-growing chain of independent supermarket retailers in the country. Schuitema’s mission is to deliver retail support for its 500 independent supermarket retailers, enabling them to become as successful as possible in their local markets. The organization provides its retailers a wide range of products, services, and expertise, including delivery of goods, promotional initiatives, human resources and salary administration, financing support, and store remodeling. Schuitema is responsible for its company’s real estate, purchasing, IT, logistics, and marketing on both a national and local level, complementing the expertise of its local entrepreneurs.

CHALLENGE

Schuitema has long depended on its data network to link together its retailers, distribution sites, and company headquarters. The company’s 9250 employees depend on the network to provide support for core business processes, including supply chain applications, finance tools, and distribution applications. Some of these tools are Web-based and others run primarily on the LAN at Schuitema’s main office in Amersfoort.

After experiencing steady growth for a number of years, performance on its key network applications was beginning to suffer and costly network downtime was increasing. Furthermore, its existing Token Ring network could no longer scale to support new applications and additional store locations.

Schuitema sought a solution to improve performance of its most important business tools, providing improved bandwidth throughout the network as well as comprehensive network management. In addition, they wanted a flexible platform that would cost effectively accommodate new services and applications in the future.

“We needed tools that would enable us to easily implement changes on a number of devices at once, troubleshoot, and monitor our network and applications proactively,” says Mischa Deden, IT project manager at Schuitema. “We wanted to ensure network availability and optimize end-to-end performance. And the solution would have to be scalable, because we don’t want to completely upgrade our network every three years.”

SOLUTION

Working closely with Dimension Data, a leading global technology company, Schuitema replaced its existing infrastructure with an end-to-end Cisco® switched network solution. Schuitema had evaluated equipment from a number of vendors, but found that Cisco Systems® was the only company that offered the scalability, breadth of products, and innovation it required for its long-term goals. And Schuitema selected Dimension Data as the systems integrator because of Dimension Data’s strong expertise in design, implementation, and service of data, as well as its security and certified learning solutions.

“Cisco offered the support for new services and applications that we needed, and their technology is based on open standards,” says Deden. “Cisco is also a healthy company and is the industry’s leader for networking technology.”

At each of its eight remote distribution centers, Schuitema deployed two Cisco Catalyst® 6509 switches connected using Gigabit Ethernet. The Cisco Catalyst 6509 switches communicate with Schuitema’s main office using a Frame Relay WAN and provide highly scalable multilayer switching performance. Schuitema chose Cisco Catalyst switches because their high degree of flexibility helps the organization to add VPN security and other options where needed. Cisco Catalyst 3500 and Cisco Catalyst 3550 series switches further extend intelligent Ethernet connectivity throughout each site, while Cisco 800 Series routers at each retail location deliver ISDN connectivity to the Internet and Schuitema’s corporate network.

Migrating from an aging Token Ring infrastructure to an intelligent switched Ethernet network immediately improved the performance of Schuitema’s WAN and LANs. However, to maximize its return on investment, the organization needed a comprehensive management solution, as well. To configure, administer, and maintain its WAN, Schuitema deployed the CiscoWorks Routed WAN Management Solution (RWAN). This suite of solution applications gives Schuitema increased visibility into its network behavior and quickly identifies performance bottlenecks that can slow its networked business processes. It provides advanced configuration tools to optimize bandwidth and utilization across critical WAN links in the network. In addition, using the Cisco IOS® Software service assurance agent, Schuitema monitors network performance between its Cisco routers and other devices to perform sophisticated troubleshooting, problem analysis, and notification.

To support administration of local networks and their extensive LAN infrastructure, Schuitema deployed the CiscoWorks LAN Management Solution (LMS) at its distribution centers. CiscoWorks LMS management applications enable Schuitema to manage its growing Cisco network in a structured way. For example, it automatically can track and report on changes in software configuration, enabling administrators to monitor performance proactively and prevent potential problems before they happen.

Specifically within CiscoWorks LMS, Schuitema uses the CiscoWorks Resource Manager Essentials (RME) for Web-based management of its Cisco switches. Using the RME browser interface, network administrators simplify time-consuming administrative tasks, such as device upgrades. In the past, Schuitema’s network managers upgraded its network devices manually or with scripts they had written themselves.

“Manual software upgrades used to take about 15 minutes per device,” says Deden. “With CiscoWorks RME software distribution, we can simply create an upgrade job and run the upgrade after hours.”

RESULTS

Implementing a fully manageable, intelligent switched network has quickly enabled Schuitema to realize a variety of benefits, enhancing performance, productivity, and network availability. For example, using CiscoWorks LMS and RWAN, Schuitema performs configuration and software changes on multiple devices throughout its network efficiently, freeing technicians to spend time on other tasks.

“Manual configuration and software changes that used to take our network managers weeks can now be accomplished in just a day or two,” says Deden.

The CiscoWorks RME bug reports save administrative time, enabling Schuitema to quickly locate the cause of network issues with pinpoint accuracy, and to proactively monitor their network to avoid future problems. In the past, locating the source of a network problem was difficult and time consuming, because the company had no overall management applications in place.

“Fault management could be an especially slow process,” explains Deden. “In one case, we had to switch off all our PCs and then turn them on one-by-one to locate the problem on our network. Our CiscoWorks solution enables us to manage our network both effectively and proactively—which we couldn’t do with our previous network. And, because we can connect users to the applications they need at twice the speed on the end-to-end Cisco network, our customer experience has been very positive.”

Frank Vergeer, Schuitema’s customer representative at Dimension Data, has found that Cisco’s comprehensive solution enables his organization to provide better service offerings to Schuitema and his other clients. “We need to combine advanced hardware and software with a solid management framework to deliver optimum network performance and availability,” says Vergeer. “Because Cisco offers a wide range of management offerings, we can deliver a complete architecture solution to our customers.”

NEXT STEPS

After completing its LAN and WAN upgrades, Schuitema is now well positioned to explore several new networked applications. The company initiated a pilot program at one of its distribution centers to evaluate voice over IP connectivity, which could further ease network management, reduce toll costs, and set the stage for new productivity-enhancing collaboration and messaging applications. Because the site already has Cisco Catalyst 6509 and Cisco Catalyst 3550 Series switches in place, its intelligent network infrastructure can provide the quality of service necessary for high-quality voice connectivity and business-critical applications.

To support even more robust traffic analysis, Schuitema is installing a Cisco Catalyst 6500 Series Network Analysis Module (NAM) on its Cisco Catalyst 6509 switches in its distribution centers. The Cisco NAM enables network managers to gain application-level visibility into network traffic to further improve performance, reduce failures, and enhance troubleshooting.

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Finally, Schuitema is considering migrating its private Frame Relay WAN to a VPN, enabling its supermarkets to securely access the Internet and company applications over the public network. To efficiently distribute traffic over the VPNs, Schuitema would employ Cisco Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) technology, a packet-forwarding technology that uses labels to make efficient data forwarding decisions. Migrating to an MPLS VPN will enable Schuitema to take advantage of multicast applications, distributing product promotional and other materials to all its retail sites. With the help of Dimension Data's service offerings, CiscoWorks tools, and its scalable, manageable Cisco network, Schuitema easily can pursue these and many other options in the years to come.



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