

GROCON CUTS SERVICE PROVIDER COSTS BY MORE THAN \$150,000 A YEAR WITH EXPAND NETWORKS



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- Philip Pearson, ICT Manager, Grocon, Pty Ltd

IN SUMMARY

- Return on investment within 14 months
- Clear gains in application and response times
- Savings of over \$150,000 a year through effective bandwidth use
- Improved QoS for remote desktops and VoIP

APPLICATIONS

- Microsoft Office
- Aconex
- AutoCAD

PROFILE

From its creation in the 1950s as a small family concreting business, Grocon Pty Ltd has grown to become Australia's leading privately owned development and construction group. Employing between 300 and 1,200 full time staff and contractors at any one time, Grocon operates across Australia and into the Middle East. Past projects include the 2006 renovation of the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the restoration of the iconic Heritage GPO in Martin Place, Sydney.

THE CHALLENGES

For more than 1,000 Grocon employees distributed across three permanent and nine project sites throughout Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, the ability to access centrally located data and collaborate between sites was not only problematic, it was practically impossible. With more than half of Grocon's 290 PCs accessing applications over an aging Citrix infrastructure, the strain on the wide area network (WAN) was causing productivity and process issues across the company. Grocon's HQ was connected to a private MPLS IP network with 35Mbps bandwidth and each of the nine project sites were connected into the WAN by 2Mb pipes. With no traffic prioritisation on the WAN, the network was struggling to cope with the load.

Philip Pearson, ICT Manager for Grocon explains; "Grocon's business is located wherever we are working at the time. With the exception of head office, our workforce is scattered around project sites and therefore relies on effective collaboration technologies to link teams. Much of our work uses design programs like Adobe and AutoCAD, which means working with large file sizes across the limited bandwidth WAN. Some of our employees were used to experiencing wait-times of up to 15 minutes when they tried to access shared files from the central file server."

Not only was the situation impacting productivity, it was also threatening Grocon's knowledge management processes. Pearson comments; "When our existing Citrix infrastructure could no longer cope with the load and response times slowed, employees began taking matters into their own hands. They were saving files locally to avoid transferring them across the network, which meant multiple versions of the same file were being created and updated without the knowledge of other employees. To make matters worse, these versions were not being backed-up properly as they were not saved at our central office."

WEB LINKS

- Learn about our solutions
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- Learn about our products
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- Learn about our WAN Monitoring Tool
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THE SOLUTION

Pearson identified that the problem could potentially be overcome by implementing one of two very different strategies. One option involved completely overhauling and replacing the existing Citrix infrastructure, the other was to use a WAN optimisation solution to replace the Citrix set-up completely.

Pearson explains; “Given the high cost involved in upgrading our Citrix systems and the fact that there was no guarantee that upgrading would dramatically improve our situation, I investigated further into WAN optimisation. I consulted the Gartner magic quadrant and approached two of the vendors - Expand and Riverbed – to determine the kind of benefits we could expect from rolling out a WAN optimisation solution.”

To prove the impact WAN accelerators could have on the network, Expand’s Australian team organised a trial for one of Grocon’s most troubled project sites in Surfer’s Paradise. After just a few days of operation, Pearson was confident Expand was the right choice for Grocon; “The trial site was selected because the employees there were the most vocal about the problems they were experiencing when trying to collaborate – but we didn’t know just how vocal they could be until we told them the Expand trial was ending! The team told me that I could only have the accelerator back over their dead bodies. After that feedback we were keen to roll it out across our other sites as quickly as possible so that everyone could experience the benefits.”

Grocon has installed an Expand 6940 Accelerator in its Melbourne head office and 11 Expand 4930 Accelerators across all other sites. Expand accelerators use low latency, lossless techniques that work on all applications to consistently deliver average bandwidth increases between 100 per cent and 400 percent. Expand’s Quality of Service (QoS) enforcement also ensures that applications run unimpeded on the WAN. This is not just prioritisation, but also includes sophisticated algorithms to combat congestion, mark packets for downstream QoS handling and rate control shaping to make sure data flows get the bandwidth they need.

THE BENEFITS

Since implementing the Expand Accelerators across all three permanent offices and nine non-permanent project sites, Grocon has been able to completely remove its dated Citrix infrastructure.

Pearson comments; “Because we were able to pre-cache relevant shared documents, the files are quick to download and employees are not tempted to save files locally on their desktops. Central storage on our file server means all data is fully backed up. Our overall business processes are also much more manageable now that everyone can communicate and share data quickly and easily.”

In addition to substantial productivity gains through time saving, Grocon is seeing a fast return on its investment as a result of being able to renegotiate its WAN bandwidth requirements with its service provider. Pearson explains; “Prior to implementing Expand, our service provider costs were around \$24,000 per month. Now that we can optimise our bandwidth so effectively with Expand Accelerators, we have been able to bring this expense down to \$13,000 per month. We will see a return on our investment in just 14 months on service provider costs alone!”

Pearson also noted that the scalability of the Expand solution will prove useful given project sites are only operational for around three to five years on average before the team relocates to another building project. In such instances, Grocon can simply move the Expand accelerator to the new site and be up and running again in no time.

Pearson concluded; “Not only are we substantially reducing our operating costs month-on-month, but Expand has also ensured quality of service for our remote users. Because Expand’s optimisation techniques work on all traffic types, we have been able to make use of other cost-saving technologies like VoIP to communicate between sites in Melbourne and Sydney.”