



Large steel manufacturer wired for success

The U.S. steel industry has been hit hard by cheaply-produced, foreign-made steel, but Liberty Steel and Wire—a century-old-plus U.S. Midwest-based steel manufacturer—continues to proudly produce 700K+ tons of the highest-quality steel each year. When network circuit failures threatened to shut down their Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) processes and stop production, it was time to explore options or risk being left behind in one of the most competitive industries in the world.

At a glance



Industry

Manufacturing

Customer

Midwest-based steel manufacturer

8 locations/plants across U.S.

1,500 employees

Centralized IT management

Challenges

Frequent downtime

Network complexity

Poor app performance

Solutions

SD-WAN Concierge™

Broadband Access

UCaaS Voice

Results

Zero network outages

Increased bandwidth

Automated redundancy

Improved app performance

Raw material matters

Quality is a key differentiator in the steel industry where cheaper and lower-quality steel imports pour into the U.S. from overseas competitors. To compete both domestically and internationally, the company prides itself on a production process that is closely-monitored to eliminate impurities. They also maintain specific formulas that ensure consistency and quality in every ounce of steel, wire, billet, rebar or rods they produce. And since Liberty's products are 100% American-made, they meet the highest standards of being Buy America Compliant.

Quality products demand a network that can stand the heat of a 24/7 production cycle without a meltdown, and it was the responsibility of Matt Bradley, the company's IT director and chief decision maker for all things IT—including design development of IT solutions—to keep the network up and running. All IT operations, Bradley and his staff were located at headquarters in Peoria, so whether a problem occurred there or another location nationwide, the diagnosis and fix originated with his team.

With a rate of 10 to 15 outages per year, each averaging more than three hours of downtime, the company needed diverse connectivity. They also needed to leverage available bandwidth on secondary circuits, but the configuration of their existing MPLS network limited their use; second circuit bandwidth remained idle until a primary circuit failed.

“To say the network was critical to the business is an understatement. Having a robust and reliable network is mission critical.”

Matt Bradley
IT Director

Bradley's number one responsibility was to ensure that the network consistently supported the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. When the network went down, the company couldn't take orders, ship products or answer phones—all which had a big impact on employee productivity and customer satisfaction. According to Bradley, “To say the network was critical to the business is an understatement. Having a robust and reliable network is mission critical.”

Changing the production environment

The search to find a solution was on, and Bradley realized that there was value in the company's long-time relationship with Windstream Enterprise. During due diligence, Bradley and his team explored competitors' solutions but concluded that they were 'not fully baked' and would be too costly because they required the purchase of on-premises equipment. In contrast, Liberty's experience with the local Windstream Enterprise team inspired confidence. Windstream's leading-edge solutions also enabled Liberty to minimize the pain of migration in solving their network failure issues.

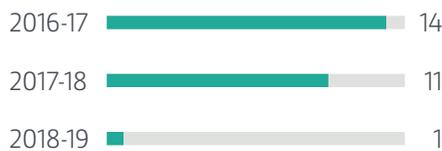
Windstream Enterprise's solution was to simplify the network by implementing SD-WAN Concierge service in an active/active configuration so that if a primary circuit fails, the secondary circuit automatically takes over. For the critical data center location, a high-availability SD-WAN solution was deployed with two SD-WAN edge devices. To leverage all available bandwidth, SD-WAN always enables both primary and secondary circuits to be fully utilized. Finally, SD-WAN also enabled the company to prioritize its most important applications and de-prioritize non-critical applications for optimal performance. SD-WAN also facilitated moving telephony from on-premises to the cloud, shifting costs from CAPEX to OPEX.

The finished product

With SD-WAN's automated resiliency and application prioritization functionality, the IT team spends a lot less time managing the network. When sites have a little hiccup, it's not the crisis it used to be; the network doesn't drop a packet when one circuit fails. End-user experience has dramatically improved, as well as productivity; Bradley's comfort and confidence levels have also increased significantly, knowing that automated redundancy keeps all sites operating around the clock.

The proof of any technology change is in the results. The number and duration (minutes) of outages have been reduced by more than 90 percent, freeing up considerable time for IT staff. "Effectively I have had ZERO sites down for unplanned network outages in the past calendar year. As a result, my team and I are able to focus on more value-added opportunities like process and technology improvements." With Windstream Enterprise's SD-WAN, the steel plant is well equipped to efficiently produce a high-quality product and remain competitive in an increasingly global industry.

OUTAGE HISTORY



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