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Theater chain casts award-winning solutions

In today's movie theater industry, size is no guarantee of success. As a leading movie theater chain in the country, this company was well aware of how technology and viewer preferences were changing expectations. With an average ticket price of nearly $10, 'going to the movies' has become as much about the overall in-theater experience as what's showing on the screen. In response to this new reality, chain management approached Windstream Enterprise for a network "re-cast" to compete against the explosion of entertainment options available from home.

At a glance

Industry

Entertainment/movie theaters

Customer

National/international theaters

Top-grossing chain/1,000+ theaters/ 10,000+ screens

Challenges

Multiple service providers

Inadequate bandwidth/frequent downtime

Lack of guest WiFi

Solutions

SD-WAN Concierge™

Secure WiFi

Redundant access (cable, Ethernet, wireless)

Professional Services

Results

Integrated network

Increased bandwidth

Reduced downtime/improved customer experience

Second run solutions

Many were ready to proclaim the end of the movie theater industry in 2017. Box office revenues and attendance were down while rival streaming providers were increasing subscribers. Despite an uptick in results in 2018, this chain continued to invest in amenities designed to attract and retain movie-goers by enhancing the viewer experience such as plush, reclining seats; best-in-class sight and sound systems; and dining and beverage options beyond typical concession offerings.

In this changing environment, the company was also growing through acquisition and tasking its IT team to manage multiple network providers across different brands. Mission-critical applications were negatively impacted by insufficient bandwidth and network downtime with an existing 1.5 Mbps MPLS network. It was clear the company needed a network integration to deliver higher uptime and a consistent experience for operators, employees and customers.

The existing MPLS provider didn't offer a WiFi solution needed for a new point-of-sale app that would enable customers to purchase tickets quickly while waiting in line. WiFi would also enable collecting data on in-theater customer behavior. Marketing analytics on customer behavior would be invaluable to enhancing the customer experience. By "recognizing" returning customers when they entered the theater, it would be possible to personalize the experience and offer real-time rewards.

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Management realized they needed a trusted advisor to implement strategic technology changes that were beyond the scope of day-to-day IT operations.

SD-WAN and Secure WiFi set the stage for network reliability

Managing multiple networks and providers across 600+ locations hampered progress until the theater chain management team learned that Windstream Enterprise was providing SD-WAN to integrate two disparate networks within one of the chains they recently acquired. The incumbent MPLS provider didn't have an SD-WAN solution so IT was interested in learning how Windstream Enterprise's SD-WAN Concierge service could resolve their network integration challenges corporate-wide.

Windstream Enterprise demonstrated how SD-WAN provisioned over-the-top of their existing MPLS network and underlying access circuits could provide a smooth, seamless migration path to cost-effective broadband connections, all on a time line they controlled.

Windstream Enterprise could also provide secondary broadband (cable/Ethernet) resiliency and LTE wireless to keep the network running, in case the primary connection failed. Internal IT resources would also gain access to SD-WAN Concierge support teams to help with ongoing support as needed. Chain management approved, and results have validated their choice.

With SD-WAN installed, the company was ready to implement a WiFi system in its theaters but lacked the manpower or expertise. Windstream Enterprise's Professional Services team performed a quick assessment and proceeded with installing the wireless access points and cabling. Secure WiFi, fully integrated with SD-WAN, provides both private WiFi for business apps and guest WiFi for customers. "The SD-WAN solution has delivered as promised. It enabled us to easily integrate disparate networks and has met our challenge of providing the higher reliability and more bandwidth that our business requires while supporting our WiFi network."

Two thumbs up

The theater is very pleased with the solutions and experience provided by the Windstream Enterprise team. "Windstream Enterprise provides us with excellent support. They kept us informed on a weekly basis throughout the implementation process. They continue to listen to our needs and are responsive to our requests."

Since installation, the business has noticed a marked improvement in network performance and service levels they can provide to their patrons. Thanks to a fully integrated network, downtime has been nearly eliminated at all locations. There have been very few outages reported because the built-in network redundancy works as expected. They have the bandwidth they need to support all applications at a much lower cost structure than the previous standalone MPLS network.

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The WiFi installation was a timely investment; it is improving the guest experience by enabling customers to purchase tickets online instead of waiting in line. Marketing analytics are being used to shape new marketing programs and customer incentives that can be offered on premises for an award-winning experience for customers every time they visit.

Cloud-enabled connectivity, communications and security—guaranteed.

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