WE

How boat retailer SkipperBud's powered a new wave of growth with SD-WAN

SkipperBud's, a retailer of recreational boats, has grown from one location in La Crosse, Wisconsin, into one of the marine industry's largest sales, brokerage, service and marina groups. With an outdated network slowing them down, the company turned to Windstream Enterprise for modern solutions to power their continued growth.

At a glance

SkipperBuds

Industry

Retail

Customer

21 locations in the U.S.

Headquarters: Winthrop Harbor, Illinois

Challenges

Frequent outages

Lack of redundancy

Impact on productivity and customer experience

Lack of network visibility

Complex systems management

Outdated communications systems

Expensive and challenging maintenance

Limited bandwidth

Unreliable voice services

Solutions

SD-WAN

Cellular Broadband

High-bandwidth Ethernet

WE Connect customer portal

Results

Reduced outages

Increased productivity

Improved app performance

Enhanced voice service quality

Cost savings

Network visibility and control

More than a business... it's a lifestyle

Some businesses can stay afloat by doing things the same way, year after year. But for recreational boat retailer SkipperBud's, making waves took them to the top of their industry. By embracing change—adding new storefronts and marinas, a showroom for boat sales, new boat lines, storage facilities and additional services over the years—they have expanded throughout Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Washington and California. Throughout their journey, the company has always kept their sights on the commitment to bringing boaters a better place to enjoy the lifestyle of boating.

From SkipperBud's humble beginnings—a single location in La Crosse, Wisconsin—to their impressive fleet of 21 locations, the company has continued their quest to make boating fun and hassle-free for everyone. But with more locations came the need for more powerful connectivity and communications, and their outdated network weighed them down like an anchor.

Knowing it was time for another change, SkipperBud's turned to Windstream Enterprise for modern network solutions to support their growth.

Charting the course

The company's vintage MPLS (Multiprotocol Label Switching) network with copper T1s, wasn't reliable or resilient enough to keep business running at full speed. Lacking redundancy, the increasingly frequent network outages caused downtime that could last for many hours. All applications were linked to the data center, resulting in lost productivity and a poor customer experience whenever an outage occurred.

> *"The Windstream Enterprise Technical Service Manager has been a great partner in helping us migrate to SD-WAN and resolve our issues."*
>
> **Todd Rasor**
> Technology Engineer

Additionally, the MPLS routers were challenging to manage. They needed to be programmed on a location basis without visibility into traffic across the network as yet another disadvantage of the aging systems.

Windstream Enterprise met these challenges by implementing SD-WAN with a dual access active/active configuration, providing redundancy for greater uptime. SkipperBud's provided their own cable broadband as the secondary connection where available. For remote locations where cable was unavailable, Windstream Enterprise provided Cellular Broadband connections.

Since the new solutions were put in place, the company has benefited from significantly reduced outages and downtime, and, in turn, business continuity and enhanced customer experience.

Riding the surge

Every new location meant more demand for bandwidth. As the business grew—along with the number of devices and applications requiring bandwidth, such as more phones, WiFi, faxes and printers—the T1 bandwidth simply couldn't keep up. Systems and apps were slow, causing staff productivity to drop as well as putting customer satisfaction at risk. On top of the costs of overall inefficiency, since service providers were no longer investing in TDM infrastructure, T1s were expensive and a burden to maintain.

Windstream Enterprise replaced the MPLS T1s with high bandwidth ethernet connections as primary connectivity for most locations, providing ample bandwidth, enabling apps to perform better and faster. Cellular Broadband ensured remote locations had redundancy.

SkipperBud's rising need for technology advancements didn't stop there—it rippled across their unreliable voice services as well. The implementation of SD-WAN created a highly reliable voice network with the ability to prioritize voice traffic over the best performing path to achieve optimal voice service quality.

Navigating with visibility and control

As sailors know, you can't navigate what you can't see. Without visibility into the network, the IT team couldn't easily manage the MPLS routers, keep a pulse on the traffic across the network or optimize its performance. The Windstream Enterprise WE Connect customer portal provides the team with visibility and control over all locations, allowing changes to be made from a central location. Valuable time is no longer spent on managing each router independently, freeing up the IT team's time to focus on innovation.

The IT team uses the portal weekly for a variety of other time-saving functions, such as setting up new devices, troubleshooting and ticketing. Technology Engineer Todd Rasor notes that the WE Connect portal was a factor in choosing Windstream Enterprise as their SD-WAN provider, a feature not offered by other service providers.

A sea of opportunity

With Windstream Enterprise as their technology solutions partner, SkipperBud's can grow with confidence. SD-WAN gives them a reliable and resilient network to power each of their locations, remain dedicated to sales and service, and deliver on their promise to make boating fun and hassle-free.

"We chose Windstream Enterprise as our SD-WAN provider based on their concierge support and WE Connect portal, features not offered by other service providers."

Todd Rasor
Technology Engineer

Perhaps just as importantly, SkipperBud's can continue to represent the boating lifestyle with flying colors for years to come.

Cloud-enabled connectivity, communications and security—guaranteed.

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