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RICHARDSON INTERNATIONAL

RUCKUS® switches foster trust with corporate IT and acquisitions

Richardson International is Canada's leading agribusiness. Over the past 20 years, the company has expanded rapidly through strategic acquisitions. Richardson's IT team decided to replace its unreliable switching network with RUCKUS. They believed that the dependability of RUCKUS switches would help gain the trust of acquired companies and make standardization easier, even welcome.

RICHARDSON

Client
Richardson Inernational

Location
Canada

Challenges

- Existing corporate switching network was unreliable and maintenance intensive

- Rapid company growth required switches that could be efficiently managed by a small IT staff from the corporate data center in Winnipeg

- Acquired mills were wary of downtime required to standardize switches

Solution

- 500 ICX switches

Benefits

- The RUCKUS infrastructure has operated without a single failure in three years

- Three network engineers easily manage over 140 locations in North America and the U.K.

- Recent high-profile mill conversion to new RUCKUS switches required five minutes of downtime

Switching network for growing agribusiness eats up too much IT time

People have different impressions of Richardson International. To many, Richardson is a regional success story in Western Canada, owned by the same family for six generations. But Richardson is actually Canada's largest grain provider and has coast-to-coast operations. Its food products (grains, oilseeds, canola and oats) are sold to customers around the world.

Over the past 20 years, Richardson has expanded its business and added mill operations in North America and Europe. Jeff Stacey, Manager, Infrastructure, has been with the company during most of this period of extraordinary growth. "In one weekend alone, we handled technology conversions in about 30 locations."

We all know that standardizing technology can be a source of tension between corporate IT and acquired companies. This is especially true with manufacturing operations.

"We have three years of data on the reliability of the RUCKUS switches in all of these environments. That reliability has given us credibility when we're talking to acquired companies about standardizing on RUCKUS switches."

Jeff Stacey
Manager, Infrastructure, Richardson International

"They want to know if our technology recommendations will improve the operations of their business and plants. And they have very little tolerance for disruption," says Stacey. "It's our responsibility to demonstrate performance so that acquired companies have confidence in what we're recommending."

Richardson was a long-time HP user. But HP switches were the source of too many reliability problems. As the network grew to support more remote locations, the reliability problems became unsupportable. "The switches were too maintenance intensive and time-consuming to manage. They didn't meet the quality standard that we felt comfortable instituting across the corporation," says Stacey.

About three years ago, Stacey made the decision to rip out all of the HP switches. He knew there was a lot riding on the selection of a new switch vendor. "We looked at the switching infrastructure with company growth in mind—easy scalability, low cost of ownership, high performance, and, of course rock solid reliability. We also considered ease of deployment for our acquisitions— transitions had to be minimally disruptive."

Working with partner, Core Network Solutions, Stacey and his team evaluated several majors switching vendors. "Some of them dropped out of contention because of high costs or management complexity. One of them sent a switch that didn't make it out of the box because the documentation was so poor. RUCKUS was the only vendor that met our requirements across the board," says Stacey.

RUCKUS switches satisfy appetite for performance at all levels

There are three network engineers on Stacey's team, all based at headquarters in Winnipeg. The network team is responsible for managing over 500 RUCKUS ICX switches in 140 locations that stretch from the corporate campus to sites across Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. "Our philosophy is to be self-reliant. We don't rely on vendor support. Our team is very technical, and we know this equipment inside and out. But it still wouldn't be possible for three people to manage a network this far-flung if the RUCKUS equipment didn't perform the way it does," says Stacey.

What does performance entail? More than just bandwidth and throughput.

Simplified management is a big part of it. "Most vendors equate high performance switches with complex management. RUCKUS believes management simplicity is integral to performance—and we know from experience that it's true," says Stacey. "RUCKUS has done a really good job of reducing unnecessary steps associated with configuring and monitoring a large network of distributed switches. Even their documentation is clear and thorough, which makes it easy for us to handle deployments internally. In fact, the networking team is doing everything so much more efficiently than they could before."

Another aspect of performance is supporting more sites while actually decreasing the cost of that support. With the old switches, for example, corporate IT had to stock different types of spares for different switch models. The costs— just for spares—kept escalating as the company grew. Now IT can standardize on one spare that works in any RUCKUS switch, anywhere.

And reliability is the other critical part. In three years, there's been only one switch failure, and that was because of a lightning strike. "We have three years of data on the reliability of the RUCKUS switches in all types of operations. That

track record has given us tremendous credibility when we're talking to acquired companies about standardizing on RUCKUS switches," says Stacey.

Five minute cutover satisfies high-profile acquisition

Richardson finalized its acquisition of the second largest oat miller in Europe, a company called European Oat Millers based in Bedford, England. It was a high-profile deal that captured the attention of the agribusiness industry internationally.

The Bedford mill had reliability issues with its existing switches. But, despite the problems, they didn't have immediate plans to rip out the infrastructure—in part to avoid disruption. Stacey's team put a lot of time into working collaboratively with the Bedford team on planning the cutover. The actual downtime was about five minutes.

"We could assure them it would be minimally disruptive because we knew how easily the RUCKUS switches are to deploy," says Stacey. "And now Bedford has a far more reliable, high-performance network infrastructure to support their operations. We'll manage the RUCKUS switches remotely, so that's one less thing their staff has to focus on."

This high-profile deployment—and the dozens of others that have come before—has helped establish a foundation of trust for other projects involving IT, like manufacturing automation. "We want to be the very best service provider to everyone in the expanding Richardson organization. The RUCKUS infrastructure is a big part of helping us achieve that," says Stacey.

About RUCKUS Networks

RUCKUS Networks builds and delivers purpose-driven networks that perform in the demanding environments of the industries we serve. Together with our network of trusted go-to-market partners, we empower our customers to deliver exceptional experiences to the guests, students, residents, citizens and employees who count on them.

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