

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview on behalf of Qwest

Sara Taylor-Hanson

Auto-Wares

Telecom Administrator

Last updated: 2008 Jun 03

Auto-Wares
GROUP OF COMPANIES

Product(s): CPE: Data - Adtran, Disaster Recovery, iQ: Private Port
Industry: Automotive, Retail

1. Business need

"The business need that we had was to create a disaster recovery network for our main location, where we have our company server where all of our remote locations access, and to also keep our main shipping locations online and in service in the event of some type of outage. We currently have a disaster recovery location out of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Lansing, Michigan, so what we decided to do instead of having two separate T1s connecting our remote locations to each disaster recovery location, we decided to look into either a VPN or this MPLS any-to-any type IP network.

The consequences if we were to stay with our point-to-point T1 is we were pretty much locking down all of our remote locations to one site, which didn't take care of the disaster recovery and also would double our costs as far as needing additional services and making sure that our remote locations had alternate circuit routes in the event of a cut. Those kinds of issues come up for each location."

2. Evaluation & selection

"There's always the financial cost from the different service providers; we wanted to make sure that the solution we had was a good financial solution. We also wanted to make sure that we went with a good telecom vendor. We get approached by different vendors all the time and their costs might be lower, but at the same time their services might not be as stable.

For this solution, I looked at three carriers just to do a comparison, and Qwest was one. We have AT&T bringing facilities into this building, so they were another carrier we looked at, and we were also approached by Norlight.

The process we used to evaluate the vendors was pretty informal. I mean, we already had a relationship with Qwest built over the years, so that was one reason we looked to them; we knew that they were a stable company."

3. Why Qwest?

"Number one, because of our relationship with Qwest; we've been with them for so long, and with the point-to-point T1s, they've always been extremely stable, and the same goes for the Internet solutions that we've used. We've had some routing issues with other carriers before, but we've never had that type of issue with Qwest; they've always seemed to be on top of that type of issue. And we've also dealt with the MASS group for customer service, and any time we've had an issue with T1s, those issues have been corrected quickly. So that was one reason we looked to them--we knew that they were a stable company.

One of the other reasons that we selected Qwest was the pricing was very competitive. Typically, they came in lower than most of the other vendors that we looked at, and we currently use ADTRAN NetVanta routers for our different services, and for them being an ADTRAN reseller, we can get those routers at a discounted price."

4. The implementation/installation

"The implementation for the MPLS services went very well. Each location had to have a new T1 circuit brought in that held the MPLS service, and that was tested between the local telco vendor and Qwest, and then at the time of turn-up, we would call Qwest circuit support, turn up that circuit, test to make sure that IP addressing was correct

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and that we were communicating, and then from there we would cut over that router to our existing network."

5. Overview of solution

"We currently have seven Qwest MPLS locations. We have an MPLS T1 at each of our disaster recovery locations--one out of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the other out of our Lansing, Michigan office. And then we also have five major distribution centers; three are out of Michigan, one is out of Wisconsin, and one is out of Chicago. We currently have two Internet T1s connecting our Traverse City and Gaylord locations, and the reason we use just the Qwest T1s there is they're small offices that do some shipping, but it's not as crucial that they are online as it would be for one of our major distribution centers. And we also have an Internet T1 coming out of Grand Rapids, Michigan, that handles our incoming and outgoing Internet browsing needs, and within the next month we are upgrading that T1 to a Qwest Internet DS3 port.

From Qwest, we did acquire some ADTRAN NetVanta routers. The MPLS T1 connections are using the NetVanta 3430s, and they are extremely easy to program with a nice GUI interface on those for management. For our T3 location, between our disaster recovery sites, we use ADTRAN NetVanta 5305 routers, and we acquired those from our Qwest representative, and they are also very easy to install and manage."

6. Customer service

"Since putting in the MPLS, we have not had to call them once since the service has been installed. We have not had any outages to speak of. So far the MPLS network has been extremely stable with no IT issues to report. We've always had good customer service and technical support from Qwest over the years. The issues with Qwest that we've had previous mainly had to do with circuit cuts at the local carrier, and Qwest has always been very quick to get that resolved or at least get back to us with information telling us when that local carrier would have our issue corrected."

7. Non-financial benefits

"The non-financial benefits of our new MPLS network have been a decrease in support; we don't necessarily have to monitor those circuits as often as we did with our point-to-point T1s, as they've been very stable. Because we only require one router here in Grand Rapids, it's only one piece of hardware to maintain instead of having a piece of hardware for every remote location to connect to. And with all of our locations being under the Qwest MPLS network, we've only had to have one point of contact for customer support.

So the impact with the Qwest MPLS network for our DR plans--right now, we only have to have the one circuit per each location instead of having two circuits for each location to create the dual route. Currently, our remote locations also use a DSL circuit as a backup VPN in the event something does happen to the MPLS network, but at this time we haven't experienced that issue.

The effects on my job personally now that we have this Qwest MPLS network is because the network is so stable, I don't receive as many after-hours calls for support as far as when a circuit would go down. When we had the point-to-point T1s and we were dealing with a location that was down hard, I would have to be online with them trying to work out how we would get them back online, being on the phone between the different carriers trying to get a timeframe of when service would be restored. But now that we're on the MPLS and we have the ability to route them to our DR location, I haven't had those calls."

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8. Measurable benefits

"We only have to have one circuit per location for the disaster recovery, and with only having to have one router at our main location here in Grand Rapids and one router at our location in Lansing, that has definitely saved us some money and also time as far as maintaining the router that we would have needed had we gone with a point-to-point solution. And currently we have the same number of staff, but it has saved us all time in support, so we're able to move on to our bigger, better projects, and not spend our time maintaining locations and circuits and routers."

9. Areas for improvement

"The one thing that we do have to deal with, being such a large corporation and having all of our services for both our distribution centers and our company store division on one Qwest bill--you know, we do have instances where charges that are added may be incorrect, and trying to work our way through that bill can be a problem at times. So one of the things that could be improved upon is to have maybe a quarterly review of the bills from my account representative with me so we can make sure that the circuits are listed correctly for the correct locations and that the charges are also correct so we don't have to go back and get a credit."

10. Future plans

"As Auto-Wares grows, we're continuously bringing in new locations, acquiring new companies--so for any major distribution center that we might acquire, we will immediately install an MPLS solution to bring them into our disaster recovery solution.

As far as a future plan for Qwest, we're currently upgrading our Internet T1 here in Grand Rapids to the DS3. As we now have opened up a public website for customers to order automotive parts online from anywhere in the country, we have a need for increased bandwidth and we're hoping that this DS3 solution is what we need."

11. Recommendations and advice

"The advice I would give for anyone looking at an MPLS solution is when you come to the table, to discuss the needs of your company, lay out everything that you're looking at. Bring a map of all of your locations with an explanation of what each location is going to be providing the company. I've had instances where we might go to the table with just a few of our locations where the service that Qwest can provide, or any vendor could provide, might pertain to the other locations that I don't have listed--and then at that point you're creating more work for yourself. And on top of that, the more services that you can put into the plan, the higher the discount level you'll receive on those circuits, which is also a benefit.

Even if you have an established relationship with a carrier, you always want to bring in a few other quotes just to do a comparison to make sure that you're at the level you need to be. We value our relationship with Qwest and I did receive quotes from other carriers just to do a comparison--and as we thought, Qwest came in and beat those prices and offered us the best network solution. But you always want to make sure that you're seeing the entire picture from Qwest and also the other carriers that you're looking at."