

# INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview on behalf of Qwest

Brian Coy

Mainsource Financial Group

Chief Information Officer

Last updated: 2008 Nov 19



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**Product(s): CPE: Cisco , iQ: Private Port**  
**Industry: Finance**

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## 1. Business need

"What we had as far as a business need was that our contract was coming up for review; we were on a frame relay system and it worked fine, but we were looking for something that would allow us to have more branches because we are growing as far as an institution and this year we're adding another 10 branches.

So we kind of have those in the background as far as what we're going to be doing for the future, and one of the things that we wanted to do was some type of system that would allow us to expand, and with the MPLS, it allows us to expand fairly easily out there to add new branches. And also we wanted to start to implement voice over IP.

Before, we were using kind of an intra-line type service on our frame relay system, but that was real limited. And with the voice over IP, it allows us more of a unified communications. That piece there is what we felt was important for us going down the road. So that was kind of our need.

Then of course, too, from a pricing standpoint--is there anything cheaper out there, in a sense? You know, we're always looking for cheaper prices, but also quality, too, and that we kept in mind as far as somebody that's got a good quality service."

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## 2. Evaluation & selection

"We knew that we needed to have more bandwidth, and so from our side of it, being a financial institution and not real big in size, we kind of wear many hats, and so to keep up on the industry, we really didn't know what was available. And so we really turned to a third party there to kind of help us out and they are the ones that really got us on the MPLS side, and one it offers more flexibility, but then also expanding. So we went that route.

The third party did create an RFP that was sent out to several different vendors and they more or less listed down what the criteria was, one, from a bandwidth standpoint; another one as far as from a support standpoint; another one would be from a cost. Kind of all those, and then we took those into consideration.

Some of the different ones we looked at were Verizon, AT&T, and at the time Sprint, but we kind of trickled those down to the top three when we got through with the finalized versions."

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## 3. Why Qwest?

"One was previous user support, and the biggest piece out there that I felt Qwest has over a lot of the other ones is support. I know from a standpoint when we call in for support, if we do have an issue, that I actually get to talk to a human being; I'm not directed through voice prompt that says 'Press 3 for this. Are you down? Press 2.'

And in a sense, going with the voice prompts, it seems like to place a service call in the past, it's been up to, in a sense, an hour, and the main thing we were wanting was to actually talk to a physical human being.

Another piece that Qwest has is a feature called Qwest Control, which allows us to go online and look at statuses as far as how our circuits are doing, and also, too, it allows us to go out there and make changes to a line, in a sense. So if we want to add more bandwidth, make the change, and really the turnaround time on it is minimal. We're not spending weeks to get something turned up that if we've got the bandwidth, we could take, say, a

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fractional and increase the level of it to be the full bandwidth if we wanted to. Makes it real easy.

And then probably the last piece was price. Qwest was the most reasonable out there from a pricing standpoint. And it's not one of those 'you pay for what you get'; I think Qwest does a good offering as far as what you get is quality, and the price is very good."

## 4. The implementation/installation

"We started out with, at the time, around 70 offices through Indiana, Ohio, to Illinois. And we started in the December timeframe as far as the actual contract signing, and the next piece was that we assigned a project manager, and that project manager was then used throughout the whole project to really make sure that the different locations we have were on schedule and basically kept us up to date.

We had weekly meetings; that was assigned every Thursday and that worked out real well--just basically kept everybody on the same track.

They also kept kind of a spreadsheet as far as where everything is, what our commitment dates were and, in a sense, what our turn-up times were.

And what we would do was actually, we had the install really spread out over a three-month period because from our side here, our IT staff is small and we had about two people that were going out to those 70 offices to do the turn-ups out there.

One of the things that we did on implementation was we also changed out our hardware, too. On the frame relay side, we were running Motorola routers and we chose this time to switch everything over to Cisco routers, so we were installing new hardware at that time also.

So it worked well; the tech would go out to the office, swap out the router, actually put the new router in, make sure that line was up and if everything was running fine, then switch our branches over to that new router then. And if everything went well, we were great; if not, then we revert back to the old frame relay side of it.

So really there was no downtime except for maybe a two or three-minute changeover so, then at the end of that three-month period, everything was completed and the project was closed."

## 5. Experience with partner/VAR consultants

"Initially, as far as setting up the hardware, we used a Qwest business partner for that because from the side there to know how the routers should be set up and know how they should be tied into Qwest, they came in and really did the initial set of routers.

We really had three different models of routers that we used; they came in, did specifications for it, and really coded it to work with Qwest well. Then once that was done, then we could basically, kind of like a cookie cutter, take those configurations and use those for other branches except change the IP addresses and the names. That worked out real well, having the third party.

So the knowledge out there was basically stay 'til we get it done and though initially when we went into it, coming off the frame relay side, in a sense, since it was rolled out over a three-month period, that we had some branches over on frame, we had some branches now on MPLS, and they were able to make sure we kept our same functionality so that, in a sense, we didn't lose any functionality--say, like the internal line that we have as far as being able to call from one branch to the other branch without going long distance. We'd just call over the data line, and they were able to keep that same functionality, so it was very good. I was pleased with it."

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## 6. Overview of solution

"The services we had were really spread over the four states--Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Kentucky. The services that we currently are receiving, or would be receiving, were the 800 service, the data service as far as our communications back and forth to the branches, and then we were looking down the road as far as could they also provide the Internet service for us also?"

Because we were on a different vendor for Internet service, and it was kind of redundant to have a different vendor for Internet service. So a lot of our vendors out there are now going web-based, so the Internet piece of it is very important to us, that we have the uptime from 99.9 percent really uptime out there from an Internet standpoint, so that way we're not down at any time.

The equipment we use--basically, we went through Qwest for our hardware. Cisco equipment's what we use as far as the routers, and we were using the power over Ethernet switches also so that, in a sense, we had the 2021s for a lot of the branches out there and the model 3745 for some of our core switches. So those routers seem to be holding up well; no issues with them really at all, and they've worked out well for us.

When we implemented the services, we got the 800 service; the data service which includes the MPLS side of it, switching over from the frame relay to MPLS; and then, going forward, want to start the Internet service as a redundant site, too, that we can use that piece there to help out from a reliability standpoint."

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## 7. Customer service

"Great. Very proactive. If there are issues, they'll call us in the sense that we have them monitor our network and if they detect a link down, that we get notified of that. They open up a ticket, saves us initially probably 10-15 minutes, but if you add them up, it could amount to a lot of time. But very proactive.

They keep us up to date as far as if a circuit is not up as far as call basically every hour and say 'Got information from the local LEC; they're currently being dispatched.' Been great basically from a sales side all the way through to support side. Can't say enough about them.

And then competence has been very well on the tech side, especially, too, on the installation as far as turn-up. There may be a case out there where for whatever reason the circuit may not be coming up just right, and the tech on the other side basically gives us different options out there or they check different pieces to see 'Okay, could it be this or that?' and actually have recommendations like 'Can you check your router to see if a certain feature is on or off?'

We go out there and look and it's like 'Oh, somebody didn't configure it just right', is what the case was. Really didn't have any techs out there that couldn't get us up and going within a reasonable amount of time. Even the frame relay group that was doing the installation for the MPLS, there'd be some cases there where we may get transferred over to the frame relay group and they were just as knowledgeable on the IP side as frame relay, and they worked out well also."

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## 8. Non-financial benefits

"The MPLS side really allows us to communicate not just to the central point, but it allows us to go from really branch to branch. With the frame side as kind of the hub-and-spoke type scenario where if the data communications are coming in, it had to go through here centrally, which one side of it makes it good because now, in a sense, you can monitor that.

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But on the other side, too, is you'd have all the traffic basically coming in and out of one central point, so your point of failure is really one central point. So with the MPLS, it really allows it to be meshed so that you can have one branch talk to another branch.

Now that doesn't mean that you can't control it--you can. But for example, let's say we have Branch A sitting out here and they want to print to Branch B; they can actually do that. It goes from Branch A to Branch B without having to come here, whereas in the past that communication would have to come here, be routed back out--so it was using up more of our bandwidth.

So that was a savings there of having the MPLS side of it to where we could actually print from one location to the other one.

From a user satisfaction level, noticed a difference is the ones that were really before we switched over to MPLS, they were kind of running full bandwidth, so now, in a sense, the response times are a lot faster and they don't notice that bandwidth issue.

Before we went to the full T-1s, a lot of the branches we were running fractional frame, and those were 256 burstable up to 512. So with going to the full T-1, a lot of those maxed out at 512 and now, in a sense, they've got the bandwidth to grow and when you switched it over, they could tell a difference immediately, that the response time was a lot greater."

## 9. Measurable benefits

"From a savings standpoint, the MPLS was probably about a 20 percent savings as frame relay was. So another benefit that we really got from the MPLS side was really to have a quicker disaster recovery site up and running. In the past with frame relay, we'd have to go out there and basically get notification to the phone company and say 'Okay, we need to change this, have all of our relay points going to a central location at some other spot, and so our turn-up time is going to be several hours if not a day, whereas with the MPLS side, we can have a disaster recovery site basically sitting out there running in the background--say, for example, a DS-3.

We're not using the full DS-3; we may have it throttled back to just use a fractional and, in a sense, it can burst up to the full bandwidth. So that allows us to have really a quicker disaster recovery site up and going.

With MPLS, you can switch it over really almost instantaneously; all we really have to do there is point our DNS servers down to the different IP address, and once we do that, now it's up and functioning. So as far as time wise, probably just a matter of minutes.

As far as how it's made my job easier is that now I can really set that information off to someone else in the area or department that is really specialized in that field.

Before, with having the frame relay and Motorolas [routers], there's not too many Motorola techs out there that support that product, so it got limited down to where it was taking a lot of my time to support that.

Now with the MPLS and being with really an IP network, the techs are a lot easier to find and hire so that we could actually bring somebody in that knew how to configure Cisco routers, IP, and it was something--language they were used to.

So it's taken really my time from an hours standpoint of--it would go in spurts. It may be six hours one day, then it may be for the whole month that you use it, to maybe a couple, two or three times a month, where now, in a sense, I really don't deal with it; basically hand it off to the tech here, who's really able to code in Cisco and support IP, so now they handle it."

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## 10. Areas for improvement

"I really haven't found any because I feel like they're doing a great job.

One of the things that I hope they continue to do is on the support side, that they keep it to where we can actually talk to a person as soon as we call and not be prompted through the many prompts out there that takes forever. That's probably the one thing that--not that they can improve on it, but I just hope they don't take it away."

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## 11. Future plans

"One is going to the IP as far as the Internet service. Right now, we're just using the MPLS for data communications and the 800 service, but we're wanting to switch over and go with the Internet service also, so they would become our ISP.

And then the other piece as far as with branch acquisitions and bank acquisitions is the additional locations we may have where we've got another 10 locations coming up yet this year that are in the process of being switched over. So those are really our pieces for the upcoming probably 12 months to have implemented."

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## 12. Recommendations and advice

"Look at, basically, a third party, or someone else for help, because trying to figure it out all yourself, there are so many different variables out there, and trying to find someone that, knows the field, knows the communication side of it, and really offer a common level out there that doesn't matter what vendor you choose, basically, their recommendation is 'Here's the route you need to take.'

And then the other thing, too, is kind of keep your mind open for expansion because you don't want to go through, implement something, and then six months or 12 months later turn around and say 'Well, we really didn't sign for this capacity and now we need to switch to something else.'

Then also, too, what really helps also is by having the RFP created gives a common ground for everybody to take a look at so that you're really comparing apples to apples because a lot of times you'll have a company that says 'Well, we do this and we do that', and they're much better than somebody else is; well, can those other companies offer that same thing?

So that way you're offering really an equal field, and then basically based on that as far as how well support is--to me, that's a critical piece there because, you know, it may come in to where a cheaper price, but in a sense, a lot of times, too, you pay for what you get.

So to us, the support is probably the critical piece to that, and the uptime. Uptime is also critical--you know, how long's it take to get something repaired out there?

And look at references. That's kind of the key piece. Don't always go off of what the vendor says; look around and talk to others out there that are kind of going through the same thing or have been through the same thing and get what their input is."