

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview on behalf of Qwest

Jeremy Powell

Miller Zell

Sr. Network Engineer

Last updated: 2008 Nov 17



Product(s): CPE: Cisco 2800 Series Routers, iQ: International, iQ: Private Port
Industry: Retail

1. Business need

"MillerZell is about a \$100 million dollar retail design firm. We go in as consultants and we do signage for companies like Walmart and H&R Block; [we] also do online applications and order tracking and fulfillment for those same types of companies. We do a lot of installation of the material that we print for these companies as well.

We had a legacy frame relay setup; the entire WAN Internet connectivity was done on an old frame relay type setup, and in order to implement voice over IP, in order to get faster data rates, we needed to move to an MPLS platform, and so essentially the process was this: We put out an RFP and we made the choice to go with a vendor that was actually other than Qwest to begin with. That implementation did not go well, so that's when Qwest became the number one choice. Had we not found the solution, the last 12 months of essentially every IT project that we have done would not have existed; we would not have done a Cisco voice over IP implementation, unified messaging and presence; we would not have been able to expand the bandwidth in our Canadian locations, both in Mississauga and New Hamburg. They just simply would not have happened.

The impact would have been extremely frustrated users, extremely frustrated clients, as our clients access these types of--they access our applications via the Internet, and if we only have a small pipe that's full of latency and is essentially legacy technology, clients are going to suffer as well. And if you take that one step further, development gets hindered because we no longer--we don't have a platform to develop for and use."

2. Evaluation & selection

"The selection was pretty informal; it was the IT network staff and we essentially set out a very formal RFP to every major provider that we could. We looked at even aggregators, and that didn't really seem to fit the bill, but the one major thing that we wanted to stress was the fact that you have to be able to go reliably into Canada--and that seems to be difficult for some carriers, but that was the major sticking point, which is why we did make a decision to go with our existing carrier. We had contracts signed in place, we went forward with the implementation, and it literally just failed, so we backed that out and changed and decided to go with Qwest, and the selection process with that was that we did the same informal RFP with the sales account executive and sent him exactly what we needed, defined the sites, defined the speeds, defined what we were going to use as far as QoS and they turned it back to us, and it was substantially lower cost than our original implementation was."

3. Why Qwest?

"Qwest came onto our radar through a carrier reseller here in Atlanta; they put us in touch with the Qwest representative and they came out for a site visit, sat down, and we defined everything we had. Like I said previously, in the RFP we said 'This is exactly what we need for these sites; here are all your addresses; here are all your exchanges--go nuts.' And I think it was probably--it may have been six to seven business days later, we had an answer and we had a proposal from Qwest. That's how they came into the picture--absolutely out of nowhere.

The first major thing was the ability to have more bandwidth for less cost. That was a big selling point for us is that--to give you an example of this, we had a previous carrier quote us a fractional DS3 for one of our sites; it was a substantial amount of money. Qwest came in and gave us a full DS3 for about 600 bucks less a month than what that carrier quoted us. So that's a substantial cost savings for a business our size. I mean, we're a very medium-sized business, and that much of a savings for us is a big--it was part of the decision.

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The ability to run QoS over international borders--that seemed to be a very big sticking point with them. They'd guarantee me certainly latency into Canada and three months after we were gonna go live with the MPLS implementation, we were gonna roll out Cisco voice over IP, and so it was just like one piece of the puzzle, second piece of the puzzle, move down the road."

4. The implementation/installation

"The implementation was five sites in one day. We literally did a forklift implementation; we yanked out the legacy frame relay stuff, shut it off; previous to the weekend, we sent the routers out to the remote sites and essentially turned them on, and they were all pre-configured and ready to go. It was as painless as an implementation could be of this size. You know, you're always gonna have those little glitches, unforeseen issues, that happen during the day, but the issues that we did have resolved--the issues that we did have were resolved pretty quick, and implementation went very smooth because Qwest had really good resources in their network operation center for us to use. They especially had very good resources with regard to the international circuits because there were some specialists that were in the NOC that did nothing but Canada, and so you could get on the phone with these people and get to know them by name and say 'Hey listen, it's doing this and it should do this.' And they said 'It's no problem.' So that was the implementation--it was one day, about six hours."

5. Overview of solution

"We have an MPLS WAN that goes to one remote site here in Atlanta and two remote sites in Canada. Our network access, Internet access, here in Atlanta is through Qwest as well through a Qwest DS3, and then all of long distance is through that. Each remote site is survivable via voice over IP, and all voice traffic is funneled out of the Atlanta gateways, so all calls, voice and video and data are all coming down the Qwest cloud into Atlanta and are routed out that way.

The CPE is Cisco-based equipment in each remote location, simple 2800 and 1800 series routers purchased through Qwest. And again, it's a passive monitor and I guess maybe an active alert on the circuit if it goes up/down."

6. Customer service

"Actually did have a failure recently, last two weeks; had a failure of some of the CPE gear and it was handled relatively smooth. It actually took two incident calls to resolve it; the first, I think, was kind of a weekend thing, early morning, and perhaps didn't get the right person. But I had an extra piece of gear, so I flipped it over to my gear and then came back in on Monday morning and called and definitely got the right person; the turnaround was a day and a half maybe for the repair. That's been the only major incident aside from some citywide outages that they've had here.

Experience with the NOC has been fantastic. I don't think, in dealing--as a network administrator, I don't think I've ever dealt with a NOC that has as much knowledge as the Qwest guys do. It's been impressive that you call and you get the same five or six people if you have an issue to resolve, and they're very knowledgeable and they're very fast. Changes to something like a DNS entry or something like that are said to take somewhere between 24 hours, but I've never had one take more than 15 to 20 minutes--so excellent, excellent resolution time."

7. Non-financial benefits

"One of the things that's hard to measure is user experience and the ease of use from my users and employees at MillerZell, and one of the easiest things that we did with the implementation was configure the gear at the corporate site in Atlanta, label it for the correct ports, and ship it to a user who technically is--they're not a

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technical user; they take phone orders all day long, they talk to clients and that kind of thing. They don't even know what a router is. But to be able to ship them a piece of equipment like that, plug it in, turn it on and it works is a big deal. It was a huge win for us.

We went from a 3-meg frame relay Internet circuit to a 45-meg DS3. Every one of my users is very happy that they can get online without delay and without the latency that they had before. We increased the speeds from the sites--one of our Canadian sites, we went from a 512K circuit to a 6-meg circuit and they are considerably happier. When somebody's trying to get out to the world to do something or to actually use our applications--because our applications are hosted at a colocation facility and we use our Internet pipe to do that--the experience overall is much better for our employees."

8. Measurable benefits

"There's about a 30 to 35 percent improvement in uptime. One of my remote sites that's now on the Qwest MPLS had an average of two to three outages a week for 18 months straight. Essentially, it was on legacy ports and equipment with the carrier, and the carrier wasn't interested in getting the issue resolved. Since it's been on the Qwest circuit, I've had one outage and it was on a weekend when nobody was at the office, so it's been a fantastic increase in uptime on that particular site.

Total cost of ownership--I think overall our spend is 2000 to 3000 dollars less a month than it was with the previous carrier, but our big savings came with the long distance to where we're charged basically a flat rate for the circuit and a per-minute rate on long-distance calls, and we're not penalized for non-usage fees; there's not a minimum commit assigned with that circuit. So that saved us a tremendous amount of money. We saved approximately 18,000 a year in long-distance fees by going with Qwest. We went from a 2000 to 2500 a month long-distance bill to the voice T1. It gives us the ability to kind of meter that out as well. We don't--we're not charged a bulk rate and then non-usage fees that's what was getting us with our previous carrier; now it's a flat rate and it's a flat usage rate, and that's been a tremendous savings for IT."

9. Areas for improvement

"Access to Q.Control should be a little bit easier. That, again, has been my only real issue with Qwest at all is that the product doesn't seem very user friendly to me as an admin, and it seems easier for me to pick up the phone and dial the NOC and get the issue taken care of rather than logging it through an application.

My recommendation to Qwest with regard to this would be to not transition an account team executive in the middle of my implementation. We had--and this'll be kind of a negative note here is that we had our account representative change or transition the middle of our implementation, and it made it difficult because it was in mid-stride and we were working towards the end goal of a very tight schedule, and that confounded the issue a little bit, to have to make that transition in the middle of running so fast and hard. That would be my only recommendation there is to try to minimize that as much as possible."

10. Future plans

"Our future plans for Qwest are bandwidth increases on all of our remote sites; that's in the next 6 to 12 months because we are expanding as a business and we require more bandwidth. That's gonna be the first thing. And then 18 months out or so, we will be physically moving our corporate location in Atlanta, and that's gonna be the next major transition is to move all those ports physically from one location in Atlanta to the other."

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11. Recommendations and advice

"A recommendation that I would have would be to get to know your account rep and your engineers and their inside people as much as--as best you can because it only makes the implementation go smoother. Get to know them, get to understand them, and get to get in their shoes a little while and it'll help to ease the implementation."