

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview on behalf of Qwest

Dusty Williams

Outback Steakhouse

Chief Information Officer

Last updated: 2009 Mar 17



Product(s): Hosting
Industry: Retail, Food Services

1. Business need

"Back in 2003 the biggest thing we faced was we actually had our data center in our building. With no backup power, no redundancy, 800 feet from the end of Tampa International runway and we had a brief fire and a flood off of the sixth floor, the year before that almost knocked out the data center. So we wanted it out of that building and we wanted it in a category five facility. Were here in Tampa so were about a month away from this years hurricane season starting. So back in 2003 we made the decision that we wanted to outsource that and get it into a building that we knew would be safe. And we did that luckily because in 2004, Hurricane Charlie was destined to come right up Tampa Bay. It actually shut the power down to our building and since we had done the outsourcing and at the end of 2003 the restaurants knew nothing happened.

Before we got hold of Qwest we had Verizon doing our data center and our network. It really was just the connectivity to the restaurants. The restaurants connected in a variety of ways and so we didnt have a single way that we did it which was a problematic issue for us. Because we had restaurants with probably overall almost 100 different vendors that were providing connectivity to the data center. So we wanted to simplify that entire process so outsourcing the data center was the first piece of that. And weve done several things since then to really simplify the entire network, data center operation."

2. Evaluation & selection

"Well, our first solution was obviously a data center outsource. And we looked at a lot of different options there, looked at a lot of different facilities. The facility that we looked at, we wanted to make sure that it was a category five building, obviously being Hurricane Alley. We wanted to make sure that availability, connectivity all the types of things that were going to go into making sure that our operation was going to be secure and safe and up were the things that we were looking at. So that was really the first thing that we looked at and we looked at the connectivity obviously between our building. And then we looked at the connectivity to other places, because wed actually gone ahead and done some other things as far as disaster recovery is concerned."

3. Why Qwest?

"Well, we went through a fairly elaborate RFP process. We looked at a lot of the different vendors that were out there. We just felt that the solution that Qwest put in front of us was the best solution for us. We were very comfortable with the account team. We were very comfortable with the facility. And we were able to maintain the operation there as far as we do a lot of the operation piece ourself. So we do a lot of things jointly. So we were just very comfortable that after we looked at it from all the aspects that we had far as our RFP was concerned, not only the price but comfortable with the facility, comfortable with the account team, that that was our best solution."

4. The implementation/installation

"This project is probably the classic example for us of how to do a project. Again, it went so smoothly that no one outside of the IT department knew that it happened which is a great thing. I mean the worst thing that you can have happen is a bunch of phone calls, a bunch of people going, whats going on? We did this, we cut over, over one weekend. They went away on Friday. They came back on Monday. They knew absolutely nothing had happened. It was the classic example of a really well managed and well run project. We actually have a backup data center in Chicago. We have done the replicating data back and forth between the two

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facilities. So we actually have data that once someone, no matter where they are, that does a transaction on our system it goes through our data center in Tampa. Within minutes or actually within seconds that data is replicated to Chicago. So, if something were to happen to our facility in Florida, its not as simple as flipping a switch as my executive team sometimes likes to hit me with, 'Well you can just flip a switch.' Well its not quite that simple. But actually within a couple of hours we could have the facility online in Chicago, people could be working off of that, working off of the same set of data which was just entered. So, as far as they know basically nothing happened.

Our Qwest team and thats the way we looked at it, we built a relationship, partnership out of it. And thats what we were looking for when we started down this path. We feel like theyre an extension of Outback Steakhouse. The important part for us is to feel like our account team and I think Frank does a great job of that, is an extension into Qwest. So we know that Outback Steakhouse is being represented properly within Qwest. And thats really what you look for. Youre looking for that partnership so that its just an extension of what we do."

5. Customer service

"When youre on our side of the house everything is driven around the account team. And you see classic ones that are very good and then you see the ones that arent so good and you know who they are. And what youre really looking for is that extension of what you do. You want somebody whos your advocate within their company. And I think what we feel we have is an advocate within Qwest."

6. Measurable benefits

"Well the results of this project, the way its changed our business is its opened up a lot of opportunities for us. We have now the capability to centralize and make the data available at a much lower level of detail than we were able to do before. Were able to backup things at the restaurants that we werent able to do before. And were going to simplify our environment because of this capability. Were going to do a lot more things centrally from our organization to be able to maintain that and manage that for the restaurant side of the house. And really take a lot of the technology issues away from the restaurants and let them do what they do, which is serve food and serve our customers.

Were in an area where disaster recovery is a pretty big item. We have to be able to provide services to our customers no matter whats going on in the Tampa Bay area. So from a disaster recovery aspect what we looked at is can we have not only the data center that we have in the local area, but now weve actually built another data center with Qwest in Chicago. And were actually replicating data pretty much real time between those two facilities. So from a disaster recovery standpoint, if something were to happen to the facility in Florida within a couple of hours we can be back up and running on the Chicago facility and our customers dont know the difference. Thats a big deal for us from disaster recovery standpoint. From a business continuity standpoint obviously what were looking at is we dont want the restaurants to be affected by that. The restaurants are sitting out there. Theyve got their customers to serve. They dont want to be bothered. These guys are not technologists. Theyre restaurant operators. And they dont want to be worried about the technology. So we try to take as much of that away from them as possible to make sure that from a business continuity standpoint if something were to happen in Tampa the accounting facilities, the finance facilities, operation facilities are all able to be relocated and the operation is still up and running."

7. Future plans

"Well the type of ROI were looking at is probably in the low million dollar figures over a couple year time period.

We havent really taken as much time, when we did the whole ROI process initially there were a lot of different business factors that came into being after the fact. There were things that we found out we could do that we werent able to do before we got the solution in place. So our ROI has actually gone up after the solution was put in because it opened up other opportunities to us."