

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview on behalf of Qwest

Krysten Westrum

TEAM Industries

IT Manager / Sr. Business Systems

Last updated: 2010 Jan 19



1. Business need

"My name is Krysten Westrum; I'm a senior business system analyst at TEAM Industries, and we're a manufacturing firm that actually--that makes drivetrain solutions. Some of the companies [we serve] are Polaris and John Deere and Eaton, and we have a lot of springs and clutches [that we offer to them].

Right now, we are [using] a hub-and-spoke topology which means that we have a central location and all of our other sites connect to that location via a dedicated T1--a point-to-point T1.

What we were looking for is something that was a little more of a meshed topology where we can actually have every plant connect to each other independently of that central location; we also wanted to have the ability to let them go to the Internet at their own location, which is something that in the past we hadn't been able to do.

They all right now--or had gone out of that central location, which also meant we had control over the filtering and the content, but it'd also mean we had a big bottleneck.

For us being in a rural environment, we--unfortunately technology is not a--something easy to come by, you know? And it was very expensive for us to keep pulling these dedicated T1s [to our sites] as we grew."

2. Evaluation & selection

"When we were looking for a provider, we had a number of top criteria that we actually considered. One was growth. They had to be able to grow with us and they had to be able to provide us with multiple solutions.

We didn't want someone who could just come in and have the T1 lines; we wanted content filtering; we wanted managed security services. We needed, you know, an actual solution and I think where--the two that we evaluated, actually it came down to just what they could provide. I think cost was also a big factor in this; the economy, the way it is right now, you know, you not only need those long-term savings--you need immediate savings. And that was probably I'd say one of the top two--beyond growth, cost was right in line there [for our criteria]."

3. Why Qwest?

"We, as a company, looked at a number of different providers. We had IBM we looked at; we also had Qwest. Those are the only two in our area that actually could provide us with an MPLS bundle cost effectively, so those were the only two that we ended up looking at was IBM and Qwest.

In the end, when it came down to cost and the way that we could grow with a company, Qwest actually was able to provide us with more of an overall solution, and with the content filtering [that] was the kicker for us.

We could not find any other provider that would give us the content filtering out of each individual location, and in order for us to meet our financial goals on this project and actually get the cost there, we had to have that go out of each plant; we had to see the decrease in costs with our licensing that we don't have to renew anymore with SurfControl or other content filtering security devices, I guess.

We also got rid of our DSL at each location, which contributed to that cost--having the Internet out of each location. So I think there was definitely a lot of factors just beyond growth--but you know, there was a lot of cost that played a big factor in us choosing Qwest.

Centralized billing was a big thing for us. Being in rural environments, [in the past] we actually had to deal with five or six vendors to get the solution that we needed. Having Qwest in the loop now, we've actually dwindled that

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down to maybe two. So just the accounting, the finance piece of it, and streamlining that operation was a big factor [in choosing Qwest]."

4. The implementation/installation

"We actually have six different locations. We are pretty standard on what we're installing in each location, so five locations being in Minnesota, one in North Carolina--there's a bit of geography difference there, but we were able to provide the equipment ahead of time, so each plant got their own set of equipment preconfigured, pretty much ready to be plugged into.

There was minimal effort on the site admins' part to actually get it up and working--in fact, we don't even have a site admin at our Andrews facility; they were able to plug it in and, you know, get it ready to go.

Once the devices were received and we had them in place, we actually worked to come up with a schedule on, you know, the go-live date, and I think it took--after we kicked it off and went live, it took about one week to get every single location up and running not only with the iQ networking enhanced ports that we put in place, but also the managed security services, which was an additional piece onto the MPLS that we had. So we actually did both at the same time, which added to the complexity of the installation but, you know, it had to be done that way.

Once that it was installed, there were obviously a few gotchas; I think there always are with an implementation. But we had great support from the Qwest team; they were able to work with us.

We had access to multiple levels of technical support, so not only [could we access], you know, operation technicians, but we also have access to security experts and so on. I mean, we had a good breadth of technical support.

Along with that, we also had the account team that worked with us on, you know, just making sure we got everything that we needed, making sure all the issues got taken care of.

We also had them helping us with the billing, making sure the billing, any credits or any discounts or anything that applied as well [were taken care of]. So I think that was--just the complete follow-through of the entire installation I think was good.

Even today, you know, there's hiccups; there's minor policy changes and things that we're making right now, but it's the same group of people we're talking to. It's the one-stop shop that we can go to, we can submit our ticket in Q.Control and everything else, and I think it just streamlines everything."

5. Experience with partner/VAR consultants

"We utilized a Qwest partner through this process, and I think having this partner around made it just that much more seamless for us in the implementation process and even afterwards.

They helped not only with just technical questions that we might have; they also helped with all the contract management, the project planning--just keeping an eye on what's going on, who should be doing what I think was a big piece that they helped us with.

And also, even at the end when we got into the billing and where the bills should go and who's--you know, did we get the credits that we should've or did we get discounts or--you know, basically is everything in its place?"

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6. Overview of solution

"What we have right now is we have five different locations in TEAM Industries within Minnesota, and then we have one in North Carolina--so we have that geography difference again.

We have our engineers at one location; we have--in fact, every plant is kind of--it's standalone, but yet we communicate a lot with each other, we work with each other. One location provides parts to another location, so there's a lot of activity between the plants.

We actually utilized Qwest to get an iQ networking enhanced port solution. With that, we also got the Adtrans, then NetAdvanta 3400 series. And I think those two combined provided us the firewall that we needed; it also gave us the ability to have Internet out of each location.

With having Internet out of each location, we also had to come up with a solution to manage the content that was getting filtered on the Internet, and in the past, being that we were going through a central location, we had one product that did that--we didn't have that anymore, so that's where the managed security services actually came into play.

We were able to use the managed security services to not only do our content filtering; it also had another layer of firewall for us, and for those we actually used the Juniper SSG 20s.

And I think basically right now the way that's all working is every plant can stay standard; we can--we apply a policy change not just on one device, we apply it to all devices. We stay very standard across TEAM Industries, and we're able to do that; we submit one ticket in Q.Control and we change all devices at one time."

7. Customer service

"The service that we've been able to receive from our account team specifically has been great. I mean, we send them an e-mail, I can submit a phone call, and I know within, you know, a few hours we have stuff moving; we either have a trouble ticket created, we have people contacting us or I can see the chain of e-mails flowing around that, you know, they're actually working on something.

They haven't--even after implementation has been done, our account team has been great to provide customer service even after the fact, and it's things like the billing, things like the--you know, where the bills go. Just very minor things. But they've been very great to just even tackle those along with the bigger things."

8. Experience with Qwest Control®

"How we've been using Q.Control in our environment is we have been using it to submit trouble tickets; also for reporting. Our content filtering, they've actually been able to do single sign-on so we not only can get our general bandwidth reporting out of Q.Control, but also our managed security services out of Q.Control, and that's an advancing, you know, process. They're working on getting better reports, more real-time reports constantly; in fact, just the other day we had one that got added to the loop that we asked for. So I think, you know, we've really been able to leverage Q.Control to not only help our IT department, who is very lean, and help have a one-stop shop for, you know, anything in regards to our network, but we've also been able to utilize it [Q.Control] on the billing side as well because now our accounting staff can actually go online and see any past history of our views--or of our bills; they can query phone logs; you know, query our network--you know, how things--how the bills have been the last three months and, you know, what's changed, the trends.

And our IT staff, too, with Q.Control and the reporting that we have with it are starting to see more and more

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trends on our network--who's using the most bandwidth, who has too many connections; if there's a virus or something else on it, it's quick to pop up.

So I think it's [Q.Control] just given us a little better idea of what our network is actually doing."

9. Non-financial benefits

"Some of the non-financial benefits that we saw going to the iQ networking enhanced port--so basically instead of a hub-and-spoke topology, we're going to a meshed topology--we were able to mitigate the risk of downtime; we were able to see better flow of data in our network going from one site to another site instead of having to go through a central location anymore.

We were also able to see some benefits as far as content filtering. In the past, using the SurfControl that we had, we actually always had some sites sneak by--such as streaming media. You know, you could block, you know, 80 percent of the streaming media, but there's always those sites that get by and those are the ones that kind of kill your bandwidth.

So by going to the [Qwest] managed services, what we've noticed is that that's few and far between; in fact, in most cases it's--we never have to worry about it anymore. It's blocked, and I think that's made a huge difference in our bandwidth. Instead of using up, you know, three-fourths of our T1, we're now sometimes using 20 to 30 percent of our T1 instead, and I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that just the filtering of the content is that much better with [Qwest's] managed services.

We're also able to not have to have a bottleneck going out to the Internet. Having all the different locations coming to one spot, you were limited by a 1.5-meg pipe for six different locations. Now having the ability to have the Internet out of each location, they have a 1.5-meg pipe to themselves between the data.

It also separates the public information from the private MPLS information, which is very important to us. So everything going down the private pipe pretty much stays private and everything in the public kind of, you know, goes down a separate path--so just that separation of the data was very nice to have right out of the gate--right out of each location."

10. Measurable benefits

"Some of the measurable benefits that we've seen by going to this solution is with the iQ networking enhance port solution of it, we actually were able to decrease our monthly costs by right around 15 to 20 percent; combine that with the managed security services and we're looking at closer to 20 to 25 percent decrease in monthly costs.

Part of that has to do with the ability to avoid some licensing costs we might have had down in the past. You know, two years from now we're seeing those savings saying 'I don't have to renew this product anymore.'

It's also the avoidance of just having DSL lines at every single location; we can now utilize the VLANs and still get the benefit of having, you know, somebody go out of the door in our network but not necessarily have to pay the, you know, 40 or 50 dollar charge to get the DSL line in.

We also did see quite a bit of improvement on our Internet speeds. So before we were talking about maybe at most 800K, you know, as far as the speed of our Internet at the majority of our locations. Right now, it never goes below 1 meg. So you know, just the consistency of the bandwidth that we have on the Internet and the amount has had great impact on our performance gains.

When you're talking about, you know, e-mails and supplier portals and customer portals and those demanding business

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applications on the Internet, you know, when you have slow speeds, it's a big impact on end users. They really want to see those high speeds on the Internet right now and I think we're able to give that to them switching to this solution.

So going to the MPLS gave us the ability to more cost-effectively increase the bandwidth at each location, so I think that was a huge factor, too, was just the ability to grow and to expand step by step. We don't have to do a huge, you know, T1; we can maybe say we want a, you know, a little bit over here and a little bit over here. So I think that was a big thing for us, too.

Another one of the measurable benefits that we have is we anticipate probably a decrease of maybe 10 to 15 percent of our staff's time in actually analyzing these reports and seeing what's going on on our network and troubleshooting.

Right now, we're spending maybe a little bit more time on the reporting piece and troubleshooting, but I think that's in an effort to be a little more proactive instead of reactive. The hope is down the road--you know, six months down the road we don't have to be reactive; we can be proactive with monitoring [the network] and the notifications and the alerts that come through with Q.Control and just having the ability to see what's going on."

11. Areas for improvement

"You know, I think some immediate improvements that we could see probably would be the integration of Active Directory with Q.Control and the reporting pieces of it. What we're actually seeing right now is we've got great reports by IP address, and it would be great to integrate that with Active Directory and not only be able to get computer names and users that're actually the ones causing the problems or, you know, using up the bandwidth; I think it would just streamline the IT job that much more by having integration with Active Directory.

Another area that we could probably see improvements is, you know, just a little bit more real-time data. I think you have that on the Q.Control side, but on the managed security services side as far as the reporting, we are right now having to wait an entire day before we actually get the best reports that we can--you know, the little more defined reports. I'd like to see those intervals closer to maybe, you know, six hours or less I think would be a huge improvement for us and just give us that much more ability to be a little bit more proactive instead of reactive."

12. Future plans

"Some of the future solutions that we're looking at through Qwest are actually VPN extensions; that's something that allows us to have a remote location and through a DSL line, they can connect right to our MPLS, which I think is--you know, instead of paying for a T1, you're paying for a DSL line, which for us is huge.

Then also I think we have talked about just increasing bandwidth down the road. Now that we have a better handle on what each plant is using for bandwidth, who is connecting what, how we're gonna lay out our network--because we're now given the ability to move our servers around if we want to or talk about having a centralized storage solution. So having that ability also impacts, you know, where we need more bandwidth."

13. Recommendations and advice

"Manufacturing combined with a very rural environment is a--you need a unique solution.

You don't always have that technology available to you all the time and, you now, you need the real-time data in manufacturing or any other industry for that matter. You know, real-time data, external e-mail--you know, these

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things become extremely important and just being able to mitigate risk, being able to, you know, have a solution that can do all that I think is a big thing.

My advice probably is, you know, find a provider that can do all of it for you, you know? In rural environments, again, you know, it's hard to find that type of company, but you know, there's huge benefit gains not only just in a bundled package--you always get a discount or something when you have a bundled package with somebody--but just the streamlining of your financial functions.

We're a very lean IT staff, again, and I think if you're a company who has a very lean IT staff, you wear many hats and I think to have to have every site admin that you have or network engineer that you have constantly going out and trying to figure out 'Who do I call next?'--you know, having a one-stop shop makes that just that much more efficient. Everybody knows exactly where to go; they know who to contact."