Tie Rack – creating competitive advantage with MPLS ADSL technology

REAL-TIME STOCK VISIBILITY ENABLED BY A ROBUST, SCALABLE IT SOLUTION IMPLEMENTED BY 2E2 GIVES TIE RACK THE ABILITY TO REACT SWIFTLY TO CHANGING CUSTOMER BUYING PATTERNS.

Well known high street retail chain Tie Rack, part of The Frangi Retail Group, was faced with the impending launch of Chip and PIN, at the same time it identified a need for real-time stock control. Working with innovative technology services and solutions provider 2e2, the retailer first piloted then rolled out an 'always on' solution that is providing increased stock visibility and secure connectivity across the 122-store retail estate.

The two-fold technology challenge facing Tie Rack's IT department ahead of 2e2's intervention led to a review of the existing Wide Area Network (WAN). The PSTN dial-up solution had proved highly reliable and had served its purpose over time, but the deployment of a Retail Java EPoS system would have a major impact on dial-up charges. In addition Tie Rack's need to query all Chip and PIN transactions with its service provider to prevent fraud would have slowed down the customer experience at the till if dial-up remained the chosen technology solution.

BANDWIDTH PREDICTABILITY
In a project sponsored by Frangi's Business Systems Director Tony Hammond, the IT department set about identifying an 'always on' WAN that would address the need for a robust and scalable solution at a competitive price point. ADSL seemed to be the right starting point. In addition, Tie Rack needed to resolve a lack of projections from its software provider for the amount of bandwidth required and was finding it equally difficult to predict what ADSL contention ratio would be acceptable. Understandably, Tie Rack opted to run a pilot to test available technologies prior to the full implementation of any final solution.

2e2 engaged with Tie Rack at this time, offering its services for the pilot at four London stores. "We helped Tie Rack to scope the pilot requirements and success criteria," explains 2e2 Line of Business Director Adam Kamruddin. The solution proposed that was ultimately rolled out by 2e2 is delivering key benefits to Tie Rack, including:

- a highly secure and scalable solution over which Tie Rack can secure transactions, run CCTV and stream video to plasma screens in the stores
- real-time stock control capabilities enabling swift response to consumer buying patterns
- the flexibility to introduce a variety of different ADSL bandwidths and contention ratios
- service level guarantees managed by 2e2.

2e2 proposed a combination of Cisco routers and Tiscali MPLS ADSL connectivity and was engaged by Tie Rack to provide network design consultancy, network equipment procurement and implementation, Tiscali MPLS ADSL circuits and support during the pilot. The retailer was then able to test the performance of its new software applications and EPoS systems across the MPLS ADSL WAN and could define adequate bandwidth.

Neil Fowler, Frangi's Head of IT Development who worked closely with 2e2's own Project Manager throughout, comments: "The pilot was a key success factor for the ultimate UK deployment as this helped us to shape our requirements and to prove the technology worked."

2e2 was subsequently asked by Tie Rack to submit a proposal for the broader UK requirement and was selected after a competitive tendering process. Adam Kamruddin adds that as well as the successful pilot, pre-sales consultancy provided by 2e2 was an important factor. "It helped Tie Rack gain a better understanding of ADSL technologies and of our ability to manage the service provider. We provided proactive support and clearly demonstrated that we really wanted the business."

> " The focus we received from 2e2 and their knowledge and experience with the proposed WAN solution were key reasons why we chose them for the UK roll-out and we are very satisfied with their ongoing service. "
>
> Neil Fowler, Head of IT Development, Frangi Retail Group

A SCALABLE SOLUTION

Tie Rack sought ADSL connectivity to all 122 UK stores and 2e2 recommended a Tiscali MPLS ADSL solution with Cisco ADSL routers. "With considerable experience in delivering MPLS solutions we had no doubt about the inherent ability of MPLS to give Tie Rack the highest level of security, unparalleled scalability in terms of the spread of access options available for future store additions, and a reduced management overhead," explains Adam Kamruddin.

Tiscali's unique MPLS ADSL portfolio encompassing a large spread of ADSL access variants was also an obvious choice for 2e2, especially as both parties had already worked together successfully to provide similar solutions to other high profile retail organisations. 2e2's partnership with Cisco enabled it to propose routers from the world market leader in WAN router technology.

The highly scalable solution links Tie Rack's head office in Brentford with the Tiscali MPLS network and critical business servers at Tiscali's co-location facility in Milton Keynes and then onward via ADSL connectivity with each Tie Rack store. The Milton Keynes facility also provides secure central internet access for corporate users and for the stores both in the UK and overseas.

LIFECYCLE SUPPORT

2e2 provided Tie Rack with a lifecycle of services including project management, network design consultancy, router pre-configuration and implementation and a 24/7 hardware maintenance service. During the design phase 2e2 provided both IP addressing consultancy and assistance with inter-connect configuration for connectivity with HSBC Merchant Services. This was one of the first IP-connected services to be rolled out across the UK.

2e2's provisioning team managed the ADSL provisioning process and co-ordinated the shipment of pre-configured routers to Tie Rack's software provider, who then arranged shipment to site for the complete in-store solution. A knowledge transfer process enabled Tie Rack to install routers themselves for the latter stage of the project roll-out.

Today 2e2 is providing both ongoing 24/7 hardware and software maintenance and 24/7 monitoring services. Regular service review meetings chaired by a 2e2 Client Manager and quarterly device inventory, availability and performance reports ensure all service and technology commitments are met.

LEAN AND EFFECTIVE

Deployment of the MPLS ADSL WAN has enabled Tie Rack to implement a real time stock management system allowing buyers to react swiftly to customer requirements and maximise revenue. The flexibility of MPLS also enables Tie Rack to add new stores to the WAN very quickly so it can take advantage of new revenue opportunities. This has been particularly beneficial for Frangi's growing multifacia business, which includes brands such as Naturally Cashmere, Tumi and Emporio Armani at international airports.

The combination of 2e2 support and remote management services provides the balance between reactive and proactive support: 2e2 proactively monitors the routers and ADSL circuits, reacts swiftly to faulty hardware and ADSL circuit conditions and provides network capacity information and guidance to aid capacity planning. This has in turn enabled Tie Rack to maintain a lean IT support team.

FRANGI
retail group   Part of the Frangi Retail Group

TieRack