



ENTERPRISE INTEGRATION

Enterprise virtual private network delivers company-wide access

Customer Profile

Rayonier Inc. is one of the world's leading producers of high-value, specialty cellulose fibers used in consumer products. It also is a major producer of timber and owns 2.4 million acres of residential and commercial property in coastal Georgia and Florida.



Situation

When Rayonier provisioned its original virtual private network (VPN), it was really more of an afterthought for the convenience of a few key senior executives. Its firewall at the time included a bonus capability for up to 10 users to connect to the network remotely.

Yet as word of the ability to work remotely spread, more of Rayonier's 2,000 employees worldwide began accessing the VPN on a regular basis. As the number swelled into the hundreds, the VPN could no longer accommodate the increasing traffic. It was then that the trouble started.

"The original users, our senior executives, saw performance degrade rapidly as more users utilized the system," says Adam Rasner, director of corporate network services at Rayonier. "We were receiving 10 to 15 trouble tickets per week for slow or dropped connections as well as an inability to get in at all. And those were just the people who were contacting us. We knew there were many more complaints."

The situation was complicated by the presence of multiple firewalls, Web sites, HR packages, end points and more. All of these fed into five separate datacenters in different locations. Since many employees either traveled extensively, worked out of remote offices or even worked out of their homes in areas where the only Internet connection available was dial-up, Rasner knew it was time to get serious about providing VPN service.

Solution

Enterprise Integration (EI), a Cisco Premier Certified Partner with headquarters in Jacksonville, Fla., had been providing Rayonier with network assessments and analysis, network security, desktop support, application layer support, hosted data center services and more since late 2007. Since much of the VPN would ride on the network EI supports, they were the logical choice for the project.

Eric Ellis, project engineer at Enterprise Integration, led the team that replaced the old firewalls with a best in class solution based around Cisco ASA 5510 Security Plus appliances. The ASA 5510 was chosen not only to make the VPN more accessible, but also to allow room for future expansion.

Results

As a part of this effort, the company enacted a plan that used virtualization to consolidate everything into two datacenters. The primary site, which has two of the appliances, is the Jacksonville, Fla., headquarters, while a third sits in the disaster recovery backup site in Jesup, Ga.

Rayonier selected several of the company's highest power users to test the new VPN before it was rolled out company-wide. These were users who would be affected financially if it didn't work. The changeover was immediately met with high praise.

"We received rave reviews when users who travel all over the country could get right in and stay connected for eight hours," Ellis says. "They could be in any airport and connect to the network. That was a huge victory."

To assure that service would continue uninterrupted, each of the appliances was sized to support triple the number of current users. The system is designed to provide both load balancing as well as automatic failover in the event of an outage.

Another advantage to the system is that it supports both those users with a VPN client and those without. The latter group can call into the support desk and be connected through a Web client without downloading any software. In addition, the VPN doesn't require a high-speed connection.

"Someone running dial-up in a cabin in Montana can get on and stay on as easily as someone using broadband in an urban area," Rasner says.

The ultimate measure of success, however, has been the support calls—or more accurately, the lack thereof.

"People used to complain about the VPN all the time," Rasner says. "We'd get four to five calls a night asking us to reboot the VPN. I can't remember the last time we had a complaint since the new solution was implemented."

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