Energy Organisation

Data#3 empowers mobile workforce with Cisco Meraki network modernisation solution

Data#3

Data#3 | **CISCO Partner**

Objective

An organisation in the energy industry wanted to create a modern network infrastructure that would support its increasingly mobile workforce.

Approach

Managing a network at more than a hundred sites meant that the in-house IT team was used to working on very large, complex projects. Data#3, also a trusted Cisco partner, had demonstrated capabilities in managing large, multi-site network modernisation projects, and this made them a reliable choice.

Benefits

- Improved visibility of the multi-site network
- Simplified troubleshooting for IT staff
- Improved performance for voice and video applications
- Increased cyber security for wired and wireless endpoints
- Enhanced user experience when connecting to the network
- Corporate mobile phones can now connect and use corporate applications
- Reduced risk

Solutions & Services

- ☑ **Cisco Meraki**
- ☑ **Cisco Switches**
- ☑ **Procurement**
- ☑ **Project Services**

Testimonial

"We have such a collaborative partnership with Data#3, and they do multiple activities for us, not just on Cisco technology but also Microsoft, and some security pieces."

Manager for Cyber Security, Organisation in the energy industry.

Project Highlight

"The highlight is that our technology is more secure, and the mobility for our users has improved dramatically."

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The Background

As an organisation in the energy industry performing the essential role of delivering energy to the general population in homes, businesses and communities, having the right technology to better support business objectives is essential.

Although the organisation's existing Cisco network infrastructure had performed reliably, the changes in work practices as well as the COVID-19 pandemic meant there was a greater demand for secure, mobile capabilities for users. With this in mind, the organisation identified an opportunity to modernise its networks and create a better user experience while further supporting a highly agile workforce.

The Challenge

Having a vital role in providing power to local communities means there are rigorous processes are in place to ensure that best practice. In the IT team, this means building and maintaining a secure, efficient environment that enables the large workforce to perform at their best. When it came to renewing the organisation's network, the energy organisations The Manager for Cyber Security said that considerable planning was involved. It was also standard practice to prepare well ahead for the end of each technology cycle.

"The project was started by the previous manager to modernise our environment and technology, and it was determined we should move to Cisco Meraki as the older technology was getting towards its end of life."

"If we didn't consider modernising our environment, we would have run the risk of not having the right support and maintenance we needed. Subsequent security threats in our wireless network would have been unacceptable."

Changing work practices were factored into the decision. Enabling a more seamless mobile experience was a priority, whether for staff moving between the 100-plus sites, or working from home.

"Previously, people mostly worked with a desktop or laptop at a workstation, but we planned a move to a more mobile, wireless environment. We worked on another project rolling out Windows 10, and we wanted to build on this to take advantage of the wireless environment, so that people could pick up their devices and walk around the building, or any site throughout our multiple companies."

The few staff travelling between sites previously were accustomed to connecting manually to different networks, but this could be challenging, with different systems in place at different locations. Unsurprisingly, this resulted in additional support calls, and there was clear room to improve on the user experience.

Support was not made any easier for the team by the lack of visibility in the complex network environment, so a better view of network traffic was needed. Consolidation of the wireless environment would bring greater consistency, making management simpler and more effective.

Data#3 Customer Story

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IT Outcome

The Data#3 project team consisted of a senior project manager, project administrative support, six consultants, and a network of regional electrical partners who worked closely with the in-house IT group and Cisco to develop and implement a detailed plan to modernise the network. The solution included deployment of 1,089 wireless access points, 632 switches, and more than a hundred routers. Using a combination of Cisco Meraki switches and indoor and outdoor access points, as well as Cisco Catalyst 9000 Series switches and Cisco Integrated Service routers, the infrastructure was designed to give maximum performance and visibility.

"It was a big project, definitely large and complex, but not the biggest we've done. The project took around 18 months in all, and we now have all sites upgraded, which is no small undertaking," described the Manager for Cyber Security.

"We took a collaborative approach. Data#3 did the running up of the equipment, but didn't have to go to all the locations, we shared the responsibility, so sometimes it would be just Data#3 and sometimes it would be just us."

The approach varied according to location. While some smaller sites could be cut over during business hours, in the larger offices, it was necessary to work outside 9-5 in order to minimise disruption to staff. While the Manager for Cyber Security said that Data#3, as a Cisco Gold Partner, had a "very high rating" for technical expertise, they maintained that skilled, experienced project managers are equally vital in large, multi-site undertakings.

"My advice is to get a good project manager who understands logistics, that is the most important thing. For example, working with Data#3, we pre-staged and tested equipment before it was sent anywhere, which meant there was less need for senior people onsite – an experienced project manager understands these logistics are critical," explained the Manager for Cyber Security.

"Everything has to be staged, packaged, shipped, and unboxed, the site has to be ready for it, plan where the boxes will go, and what happens with the boxes that are removed – it is the logistics that will kill you."

The IT team is appreciative of the simpler management and increased visibility of the modernised network environment. The clearer view of network traffic allows the organisation's team to better understand and predict organisational needs, and to anticipate issues, so that they can act more proactively in providing capacity and in preventing problems. The visibility, and the ability to define access based on client, identity, and intent, are especially a benefit in terms of meeting stringent security requirements. Importantly, access control is seamless and consistent between the many locations.

"The Cisco Meraki technology enables us to provide a more robust security process for wireless and roaming."

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Business Outcome

While the project was planned before the world was faced with a global pandemic, the increased capacity for staff to work from home quickly showed its worth. The combination of the network modernisation and a remote work project proved essential.

"We had 4,000+ employees, and previously fewer had asked to work from home," said the Manager for Cyber Security.

For users traveling between locations, the ease of getting onto the network at each new location meant they could simply pick up their work without wrestling with separate sign-on process, and without calling the helpdesk. Whether working on a laptop or corporate mobile phone, at each new site, the network recognised their device and assigned the correct access levels, even when they had moved from one location to another. The users have access to their familiar corporate applications wherever they go.

"I regularly travel for work, and since the deployment I've been able to connect to the wireless seamlessly wherever I am. It doesn't matter which company network we now use; they are consistent. Our executives can travel around the state and connect at any spot easily and securely."

"The two large projects we completed took the pain of logins away. This was originally a pain point going between different companies because cabling and networks were structured differently," said the Manager for Cyber Security.

While the choice of the modern Cisco network technology was relatively simple due to its combination of reliability, manageability, and performance, there were other considerations that were important in selecting the best solution. Data#3 procurement specialists were able to help make the project happen within the right budget.

"We have a strong cost management focus. Cisco offered an Enterprise Agreement and a bundle package that made it financially palatable for our current management to support."

Conclusion

For the wider organisation, much of the success of the project is down to communication, and a strong project manager that their in-house team worked with well.

"We met with the senior project manager weekly, and had a monthly account meeting with Data#3. There were ad-hoc meetings as well. It was a luxury to pick up the phone to call people if I had a problem, and they would respond positively," said the Manager for Cyber Security.

"We have such a collaborative partnership with Data#3, and they do multiple activities for us, not just on Cisco technology but also Microsoft, and some security pieces. They are able to focus on what we need, they have good quality quoting and processes, and strong expertise."

The greatest icing on the cake, has been the improvement to user experience while also improving security.

"Our highlight is that the technology is more secure, and the mobility for users has improved dramatically. They can pick up their laptop or phone and head into another room, go home, come back into the office, and voilà! They are connected."

"With this project, they can use any device, anywhere," concluded Manager for Cyber Security.

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Data#3 and Cisco

As a Cisco Gold and Master Specialised Partner, Data#3's relationship with Cisco has grown progressively over more than 20 years. During this time, Data#3 has become one of Cisco's largest partner in Asia Pacific with significant capacity throughout Australia and the capability to deliver business outcomes using Cisco's technology.

Through a committed partnership, our technical team has developed deep expertise across Cisco's portfolio, giving Data#3 an edge when it comes to navigating the complexity of the digital era and solving your business challenges with the best technology solutions.

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