Environmental Services Firm

SSE Completes Interviews, Audits and Infrastructure Upgrades Before Taking Over IT Support to Ensure a Smooth Transition

Client Need

A St. Louis based environmental services firm was undergoing tremendous growth and unfortunately at the same time, tremendous growing pains. They had been working with another IT provider for over seven years, starting out with one another and growing together. But over time, the environmental services firm grew four times larger, while their IT vendor only doubled in size and could not keep up with many of the now pressing issues. One of the biggest challenges the company was facing was the stability of their network. Their system would go down "all the time" according to the Vice President, whose job it was to make the 40 minute trek into work by 6:00 am in order to get the system back online!

In addition to the disruption of daily operations, the firm was having serious issues with their phone system, which became a problem as customers tried to reach them. Also, they could not pass PCI compliance, (which is a set of requirements issued by the Payment Card Industry to ensure ALL companies who process, store, or transmit credit card information maintain a secure environment,) due to too many vulnerabilities.

With all of these significant problems, the firm knew that if they wanted to continue to grow, it was time for a change and time to get their IT operations aligned with their strategic goals. They engaged SSE to evaluate their network systems.

An initial network audit uncovered yet more inconsistencies with the firm's network. Previous years of email could not be located, questioning the reliability of backups; anti-virus had been disabled on many workstations and servers; many of the servers and workstations were out of warranty, and were running operating systems that were no longer supported; firewalls had not been updated in six years; the Exchange

> " *As a company we are really trying to grow and go to the next level. Before working with SSE we were so restricted with our network operations and many days just felt as if we were chasing our tails. When you're chasing your tail, you can't grow. Now that they have helped us add stabilization to our daily operations, it's nice to be able to start looking forward.* "
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> **- Mari F. Vice President**

email system was running on a non-supported version; and finally the UPS system had a failed battery, potentially leading to a damaging "hard" crash of the server. SSE also uncovered certain systems that had been broken for some time, such as their camera system which was failing to perform the primary objective of providing surveillance for their key locations. With this many issues, the firm was eager to switch vendors.

The SSE Solution

SSE knew making a quick switch of IT support before really uncovering the root issues of the problems could be disastrous for both companies. Before jumping right in, SSE took some time to learn more about the current state of the firm's network through a series of interviews, audits, management meetings and discussions. They deployed an engineer to evaluate every workstation and server to determine whether it was a "keeper", "fixer", or "throw-away."

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SSE could then develop a list of issues that needed to be addressed based on the reality of the situation. They pulled together three solution options to present to the environmental firm ranging from Good, a cost-effective solution meeting the minimum requirements of fixing the issues, to Better, a middle-range solution, to Best, a fully redundant, top-of-the-line solution. Presenting the solution choices side-by-side highlighting pros, cons, features, timelines, and costs allowed the environmental services firm to make a fully informed decision for their business while keeping their strategic objectives and budget in mind.

Ultimately, with the selection of the middle-range solution, SSE completely redesigned the entire core of the network, which involved standing up new servers, new firewalls and new workstations. Updating the servers and workstations was a priority to increase efficiencies in speed and reliability. Old systems are also more susceptible to viruses or other network attacks, therefore updating these systems, along with the addition of three firewalls, helped to increase security measures needed for PCI Compliance, while at the same time maximized site-to-site communications. The SSE solution resolved all data and email backup issues, anti-virus challenges, and added power protection if the server went down. This redundant hardware/software solution also leveraged virtualization to allow for better return on investment.

SSE had alleviated many of the phone issues just by fixing the network infrastructure, since the phone system was a VOIP system that relied on network connectivity. To help address the remaining phone issues, SSE coordinated with the firm's phone vendor to isolate the issues they were having and ensure the firm had the ability to properly manage the system from network resources.

After the network was stabilized, SSE then put its proprietary monitoring and network management tools, the Pretecht[sm] system, in place in order to provide ongoing proactive network support to the environmental firm. This included 24/7 performance monitoring, maintenance, security, troubleshooting/resolution and quarterly technology reviews to plan for future business needs and ensure IT alignment with the firm's overarching goals. SSE completed the entire transition and infrastructure rebuild in under four weeks. As any major transition is bound to have rough patches as organizations learn to work with each other, SSE also tried to mitigate any anticipated "road bumps" by scheduling a Help Desk Technician to be onsite at the firm once a week for two months to help each organization reach a mutually fulfilling partnership right from the beginning.

Client Benefits

Since working with SSE, the reliability and stability of the environmental firm's network has improved immensely. With the reconfiguration of some VPNs and adjustments to bandwidth, the connectivity issues that were apparent in the past are no longer causing systems to run slow. And much to the Vice President's delight, the task of trekking to the office to reset the server at 6:00 am has been taken off of her To-Do List! The times savings alone has shown significant improvement in daily operations. In addition, with the many added security levels, the firm is now better positioned to pass PCI Compliance and just by resolving network traffic issues, SSE was also able to bring their entire camera system back online.

Now the firm can think about moving to the next level with the following benefits working to their advantage:

Increased Efficiency: Replacing the servers and outdated work stations, reconfiguring bandwidth issues and eliminating problems to provide constant "uptime" helped increase the efficiency of the network and changed the dynamic from expecting the server to crash any minute to experiencing continuous business flow during daily operations.

Improved Infrastructure Design: Reconfiguring the entire core of the network system and updating outdated equipment has improved the overall stability and reliability of the environmental firm's infrastructure and increased the speed and efficiency of the network systems so employees are better equipped to do their job.

Efficient Security: With deploying new firewalls and stabilizing the network to include making sure all security holes were closed, the environmental services firm can rest assured they are less vulnerable to security breaches and are now better positioned to pass PCI Compliance.

Reliable Support: With SSE's proprietary Pretecht[sm] system, 24/7 real time monitoring ensures most problems are detected and fixed before escalading into catastrophes, often from a remote location with no disruption to business functions.

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