

Having the Right Connectivity is Now Critical in Retail and Hospitality

What would be the impact on your business if your remote offices, staff, and business associates, such as logistics and stores or customers, could not connect to you?

Businesses rely on fast and secure Internet services to ensure that connections with clients, suppliers, partners, and guests remain reliable and constant at all times. Staff productivity is reliant on the speed of access to business applications, and delays in connectivity can have a big impact on the business from reducing production, harming sales, and slowing down responses especially when relying on multi-channel connectivity to deliver services to consumers. So whether an organisation is moving to or has business applications in the cloud, connecting remote sites or stores or expanding internationally getting the right connectivity is critical to the business.



But, with data-hungry applications and the amount of data, it's not just about speed but also bandwidth linked into the digital strategies that allows organisations to grow their business, bring new services to market, keep staff informed, and enhance the user experience.

When enterprises have multiple brands, effective connectivity gives them the power to achieve full integration, reducing overheads and boosting resilience while successfully maintaining entirely separate brand-identities.

It is resilient connectivity that allows an organisation to adapt swiftly and efficiently when new challenges emerge, such as the installation of vital new apps or the requirement to accommodate growing numbers of employees or contractors who use their own devices and require reliable, fast connections to the network.

These are the pressures that make it more critical than ever for retail, hotel and restaurant chains to use a managed services provider to select the best solutions so that networks remain connected and fully operational. This includes provision of alternative connectivity that will kick in as a business continuity solution when unforeseen events occur, ensuring there is never any downtime.

Since no wired connection can deliver 100 percent uptime, the question is one of how to protect an organisation from loss and disruption when it happens, using reliable and secure backup, wherever the location.

Access to applications

It is after all, a fact of life now that everyone takes connectivity for granted, assuming it will always be available.

Applications relying on this connectivity include everything from payments, accounting, building management, stocking, room-booking, and ordering systems ,to videoconferencing and film streaming.

Businesses, for example, now routinely share large documents for internal or external use using a cloud service such as Dropbox or Google Drive for speed and convenience, particularly as so many files now include complex graphical interfaces that can be difficult to transfer via email.

Retailers in particular are now using cloud and over the top apps and operate distributed architecture systems, all of which

depend on robust connectivity. In addition, in the back office they must remain fully connected to thousands of suppliers, as well as their logistics companies.

With stock levels kept to the minimum, poor connectivity undermines efficiency, leaving stores undersupplied and customers very annoyed.

Equally, if retailers are offering home deliveries, connectivity is what underpins the entire system, allowing thousands of consumers to place orders and arrange time slots. With underperforming connections, customers quickly lose patience, seldom to return. Similarly, hotels with weak connectivity quickly lose out on room bookings coming through their websites or those of third-party aggregators.

New opportunities

The new pressures on bandwidth include the emergence of shadow IT, in which people bring their own devices and download applications for their own use. In hospitality, guests use hotel Wi-Fi to view films, exchange files, and take part in conferencing, while restaurant customers now expect to log on with their smart devices while waiting for their order or mulling over a coffee.

Success too, brings its own pressures. As businesses expand across national borders, they encounter different types and standards of connectivity, making a managed service provider's single interface to deal with all the complications a vital advantage.

Managed services

Indeed, when so much depends on connectivity, no organisation can afford to overlook the skills of an international managed services provider.

Businesses need to have access to external expertise, allowing them to continually reassess their requirements so they do not jeopardise their operations through inadequate or outdated provision.

It is dangerous to assume that the connectivity installed 18 months ago will still allow a business to optimise all its functions and applications when the traffic is growing exponentially.

This is especially true in retail or hospitality, where multiple demands and uneven patterns of use can create all kinds of problems.

Organisations in these sectors need the expertise of managed service providers to conduct a full assessment and provide the most cost-effective connectivity to suit both current and projected needs, along with a full continuity backup solution.

When a contract typically runs for 24 months or a business is undergoing transformation, scoping future connectivity requirements is vital.

A perfect fit

Each business' pattern of use is different and requires careful examination of bandwidth requirements as well as connection speed. Is it mostly transactional data that is being transmitted, or is the business downloading more than uploading?

In the car rental industry, driver details have to be submitted to head office for approval before a car can be hired, making for a high bandwidth requirement.

After careful scoping, it may be that an ADSL connection will serve a business well, or that a VDSL connection will be required to provide higher speeds. On the other hand, SDSL may be necessary because the bandwidth needed in both directions is identical.

Of course, fibre offers the fastest connection, but it is comparatively expensive and not always available as connectivity is reliant on the infrastructure installed by telecommunications companies.

Secure and reliable connectivity allows retailers the flexibility for staff to BYOD, so where organisations rely heavily on staff using tablets and mobile devices, 3G or 4G connectivity will be required, and if sites are in remote or poorly served areas,

satellite services have to be part of the mix, with the proviso that their bandwidth is not as high as other solutions.

Satellite is, however, ideally suited to geographically dispersed sites or to locations where standard telecommunications services are either nonexistent or in an early stage of development.

Future-proofing

In fact when considering connectivity, businesses now need to think far less in terms of connecting points A and B and far more in terms of extending their network into the cloud. Businesses know they cannot afford a wide area network failure, and those considerations have to extend to how they connect with all their partners, customers, and suppliers. These are the kinds of challenges that a managed services approach is designed to overcome, using the most suitable technology available, freeing up in-house IT teams to take care of their own internal projects.

Applications can be prioritised according to a business' requirements and budget, using broad-based experience earned in other sectors to shape the solution. In the case of a retailer, priority would, for instance, be given to the connectivity supporting payments, which must not only be robust, but fully secure.

In conclusion, we can see that connectivity, especially in retail and hospitality contexts, requires constant reappraisal and the matching of a variety of potential solutions very precisely to current and predicted requirements.

It is a skill that only managed services providers have, being open-minded about technology and possessing deep knowledge of what works. Their experience in the field means they can take out all the pain-points and pitfalls, supplying solutions that optimise operations and stay within budget.

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