Hooking up your brands shouldn't give you high-cost headaches

Sophisticated companies with multiple brands that each have a distinctive and jealously-guarded identity often prove leaden-footed when it comes to managing their connectivity.

In a sector such as cosmetics for example, a single company may have a dozen competing brands that have been acquired over time, are run separately and leave the head office with the headache of managing multiple IT estates.

In a department store it may well have several brands, each with its own supplier of broadband, voice and Wi-Fi connections. If there are five brands, that often means 25 separate lines, five points of contact for maintenance and five sets of bills.

Of course, the independence of brands in the same ownership is often fiercely protected, even if they are not directly in competition with one another.

Yet by allowing historical anomalies in connectivity to continue, their owners are missing out on the cost and efficiency benefits that come from having one managed services provider, and just as importantly, they put all their operations at risk through lack of resiliency or compliance.

If we take the example of a retailer with several brands in one department store, not only does this ramp up costs of installation and maintenance, it hugely complicates the resolution of problems such as unforeseen downtime.

In today's store environment, customers who rely on Wi-Fi to use their own devices and fashionable brands quite rightly want to deploy tablets, beacons or digital display technology.

How much simpler this is for the head office when it is all taken care of through a uniform, packaged solution from one established supplier that is capable of ensuring a high-quality network and reliable connectivity across different brands.

Payment security too, becomes unnecessarily complex if brands use different systems, resulting in contracts from a range of suppliers with varying approaches to compliance. Where brands also use the network provided by the landlord, guaranteeing security can be doubly difficult.

A Managed Services Provider (MSP), however, is able to rationalise the estate, providing, simpler, more cost-effective, resilient and secure connectivity. A set-up that previously required 25 lines to serve the varying needs of different brands under the same roof can be reduced to just five. It may even be possible for

the different brands to run all their in-store applications on two "pipelines" with virtual circuits on top that give them the complete security and independence from one another that they require.

As an independent provider, the MSP will be trusted by the managements of the respective brands, which may well be suspicious not only of one another, but of intervention by their headquarters.

An established MSP with deep expertise can support the brand-owner's operations in every location, using whichever form of connectivity is most suitable, not only for the individual brands, but for the site.

For widely dispersed retail operators, this may include low-cost satellite broadband, which guarantees a secure connection when landlines and terrestrial infrastructure are hit by downtime.

The advantages of having a single provider are apparent when a company embarks on international expansion. An MSP with established operations across different territories or continents is quickly able to install the same multiple-brand operation in new locations, deploying the best and most cost-effective solutions available. Implementation is faster and more reliable because of the pre-existing familiarity with the requirements and characteristics of each brand.

For the head office, the major advantages of using an MSP are in cost-effectiveness and simplicity. No longer are hard-pressed IT teams struggling to keep on top of their network while dealing with the rival claims and mutual suspicions of different brands. Working to Service Level Agreements, MSPs are fully transparent, providing IT with a single interface.

IT, in turn, can focus on what really matters, which is running all their applications and processes smoothly, with sufficient time and capacity to innovate and develop.

For the business, the cost and efficiency advantages are obvious, effectively having one set of bills with one company for the entire national or international operation. Instead of having to deal with multiple providers, they have a single, experienced partner supplying huge economies of scale while possessing the capacity to support expansion and change across many countries.

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About Hughes

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