IFFCO consolidates information resources on end-to-end Cisco architecture

Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative (IFFCO) depends on Cisco's communication solutions for information sharing among member cooperatives. Powered by Cisco's core and advanced technologies, this unified IP-based network allows IFFCO to run a wide range of data, voice and video based applications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer name
Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative (IFFCO)

Industry
Fertiliser Manufacturing & Distribution

Business Size
5 Plants, 550 Marketing Offices, 165 Farmers Service Centre and 37300 Cooperative Societies

Business Challenge
- Integrate information resources on a single communication network
- Provide an integrated voice and data solution for resource sharing across its Offices
- Minimize administrative expenses through remote management of information resources
- Run web-based applications for providing new services to members

Network Solution
- Cisco Integrated Services Routers (ISR)
- Catalyst range of multi-layer switches - 6500 Series, 4500 Series and 2950 Series.
- Cisco Call Manager and 200 hard phones
- VT Advantage communication solution for video functionality over IP phones
- Cisco PIX series of dedicated firewall appliances and Intrusion Prevention System (IPS)

Business Value
- 80 locations interconnected over WAN, including Kandla plant and regional offices
- Better resource utilization and enhancement of overall productivity through sharing of information resources
- Built architecture for successful convergence of data, voice and video

Customer Background

Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative (IFFCO) is the world's largest fertiliser cooperative and the largest producer of chemical fertilizers in India. Established in 1967 as a collective initiative of the farmers of the country, IFFCO today boasts of annual sales of over Rs.9700 crore and markets its products through more than 37300 Cooperative Societies and 165 Farmers Service Centres across India.

IFFCO became has became an autonomous body in 2004 after the Government's majority stake in the fertilizer giant was reduced to nil. According to a survey conducted by Economic Times Intelligence Group (ETIG) in 2004-05, IFFCO emerged as a premier enterprise in terms of sales, net worth, profitability and fixed assets.

IFFCO's primary objective is to provide quality fertilizer and technical know-how on agriculture to the farmers through its member-cooperatives. It operates five large fertilizer plants located in Gujarat, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. It has also instituted a number of promotional and developmental programs to support its members and in response to their evolving needs, it has diversified its activities by also promoting a general insurance company.

Business Challenge

Traditionally, IFFCO functioned on need-based infrastructure with applications running on disintegrated networks across the organization. Over the years, as IFFCO emerged as the largest producer of fertilizers in the country, the scale and spread of its operations demanded best-of-breed interconnectivity between plants and offices for efficient sharing of data.

In 2001, IFFCO initiated a complete network upgrade to meet several strategic objectives. There was an impending need to consolidate IFFCO's information resources and connect its offices on a single robust, secure and scalable communication platform. Another objective was to build a foundation for future IP services and to prepare for the convergence of data and voice over a common network backbone. A third objective was to accommodate growth, enabling IFFCO to connect a growing base of cooperative offices across India while assuring high application performance for a wide range of application traffic that includes market data feeds, production and supply chain data, e-mail, web browsing, video interaction etc.

Cisco engaged with IFFCO early on at the opportunity-creation stage and convinced the team of the technical superiority of an end-to-end IP-based solution. Further on, not only did this fulfill the requirement for high-speed connectivity over a wide-area network, but the IFFCO architecture also went on to include Cisco's advanced technologies for wireless, security and IP-based voice and video telephony solutions.

Network Solution

The wide-area network architecture encompassed 80 locations, including IFFCO's Kandla plant and some regional and area offices. The network runs on point-to-point leased links and MPLS VPN links and is powered by Cisco's industry-leading products – the Integrated Service Routers (ISR) and the Catalyst range of multi-layer switches - 6500 Series, 4500 Series and 2950 Series.

The Cisco Catalyst LAN switches at the access layer extend control from the network core to the edge with intelligent network services, including advanced Quality of Services (QoS), scalable performance, comprehensive security and manageability.

As part of the end-to-end IP architecture, Cisco installed 200 hard phones and VT Advantage communication solution at some locations for providing video telephony functionality to the Cisco Unified IP phones, in addition to deploying wireless access points and the Cisco PIX series of dedicated firewall appliances and the Intrusion Prevention System (IPS) for securing the network.

With this interconnectivity, IFFCO offices and plants can efficiently exchange production information and report results online, and the network also supports ERP-like applications and mail messaging that enhances the organization's productivity.

"We are pleased that IFFCO chose an end-to-end IP-based network solution that was robust, scalable, which not only fulfilled all of its current requirements, but also set the framework for network upgradation and expansion in the future," said **Jangoo Dalal, Senior Vice President, Cisco Systems.**

Business Value

The network has facilitated the deployment of centralized applications, consolidation of data and resources, assets monitoring, virus management, version control, standardization of business processes, production and sales performance monitoring and faster policy communication etc. Applications running on the network include IP Communications suite, e-mail, work flow applications, business processes for HR, Finance, Inventory, Sales as well as Internet-based applications like e-Recruitment, e-Procurement and a Rural Information Portal for the benefit of cooperative members and farmers.

Commenting on the deployment, **SC Mittal, Senior General Manager, IFFCO said,** "Spurred by the rapid increase in business volume, IFFCO was keen to revamp its IT infrastructure and put in place a unified network that would facilitate information sharing among various cooperative members, thereby leading to better resource utilization and enhancement of overall productivity. We are pleased to have found an able partner in Cisco that helped us fulfill our objectives."

As the next steps to the deployment, IFFCO will expand its network to cover more locations across the country. In addition to expanding its range of products and services for tapping new markets, IFFCO is also planning a host of international and domestic business ventures. With a robust IP-based communication architecture in place, IFFCO expects to have a secured and seamless integration of the new operations with its core business.