

CASE STUDY

OMNIA GROUP HAS A CLEAR IDEA OF ITS FUTURE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION. ARUBA NETWORKING UNDERPINS THAT VISION.



With escalating costs, water shortages and land scarcity, meeting the consumption needs of a booming global population have never been more challenging. Answering those challenges means working smarter which is why agriculture is now a digital industry where the modern farmer relies as much on technology as on tractors.

One major ally in the battle for greater efficiency is the Internet of Things (IoT). An example is the use of remotely monitored sensors that can detect soil quality, moisture content and crop efficiency and growth patterns. The massive quantities of operational information they collect can then be analysed by 'big data' applications, providing results that drive improved processes and lower costs.



WIDE-REACHING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

This kind of forward-looking innovation is just part of a wider digital transformation launched by South Africa's Omnia Group. A progressive organisation formed over 60 years ago, Omnia was initially rooted in the fertiliser and agriculture industry but has since diversified into mining explosives and chemicals with the acquisition of BME and Protea Chemicals. Already the group operates across 17 African countries and has a presence in the US, South America, China, Mauritius, Australia and New Zealand – with further expansion planned.

At their headquarters, Omnia promotes a Mobile First culture where a collaborative environment has been enabled by the use

REQUIREMENTS

- Implement long-term digital transformation
- Standardise and consolidate IT provisioning
- Take advantage of Internet of Things
- Support business expansion
- Extend the use of mobile devices

SOLUTION

- Aruba indoor & outdoor Wireless Access Points
- Aruba Mobility Controllers
- Aruba Campus & Branch Switches
- Aruba ClearPass Policy Manager
- Aruba AirWave Network Management
- HPE Financial Services

BENEFITS

- Delivers highly performant networks to support existing workload and future planned development.
- Enables greater mobility and security.
- Readies the company for Internet of Things and digital farming development.
- Reduces cost and management burden.
- Supports location-based services for increased efficiency.

“It's important for me to deal with companies that have the right technology, the right level of investment in that technology and an understanding of our business. Aruba has given us the ideal infrastructure to support our digital vision of the future, and it's already starting to pay off.”

RAJAN PILLAY
HEAD OF IT, OMNIA GROUP

of Microsoft Office 365 and Skype for Business solutions. At their plants, Omnia is increasingly using tablets, and other mobile devices to collect data, carry out regulation checks and real-time data and information analytics. Stocktaking and other activities at their warehouses are also optimised by the use of mobile scanners and other devices. Omnia are increasingly reliant on their Wi-Fi infrastructure for these business-critical functions and consequently, expect resilience and data security from their solution.

“A key element of our transformation strategy is to refresh hardware and software so they can make a difference to the daily lives of our staff that underpins operational excellence. That will bring innovation which in turn will drive customer and corporate growth,” says Omnia's head of IT, Rajan Pillay. “Also key is a decision to align with fewer strategic vendors, and two of those

are HPE, Aruba and Microsoft. We want to have a clear path for transformation through standardisation and consolidation.”

Need to streamline network provision

Omnia standardised on Hewlett Packard Enterprise [HPE] for its data centres including servers and storage as well as on Hewlett Packard Inc. for PCs, laptops and printers. It has also invested in a comprehensive Microsoft stack from operating systems, databases, CRM to ERP but one brick in its transformational wall was preventing success and that was its legacy networks.

Ageing technology could no longer cope with the growing volume of connected devices. Bottlenecks occurred, users were frustrated and processes were disrupted. Over the years, corporate acquisitions had also resulted in a multivendor environment that was hard to manage and expensive to maintain.

Pan-company Wi-Fi

“We realised that if the performance of the networks were inadequate we would throw away all the hard work that had been put into other successful implementations,” adds Pillay. “Vendor selection for new networks was quite easy. HPE was already our strategic partner and we benchmarked it against the Gartner Quadrant. At that stage, it had just acquired Aruba, and this put it firmly in the leading top right-hand corner. That sealed our decision. We already knew HPE and adding Aruba into the equation confirmed that this was the right choice.”

The Aruba installation provides Wi-Fi connectivity across the head office, three branches and two plants. It includes six Aruba 7030 & four Aruba 7210 Mobility Controllers, 328 indoor Aruba AP215 access points and 150 AP270-series outdoor access points as well as 150 Aruba switches. Also deployed are Aruba ClearPass Policy Manager with Aruba AirWave Network Management.

To ensure a robust network connecting the wireless infrastructure and providing the resilience necessary for Omnia Group’s operations, over 175 Aruba Campus and Branch switches have been deployed at the five separate sites. This infrastructure consists of 58x 2920, 92x 2530, 10x 3810M, 10x 2515 and 5x 5510 switches.

Cabling has also been refreshed in the wired networks, introducing fibre for the core backbone and raising standards to a minimum of Cat6. However, to support the introduction of more mobile devices, the main emphasis is now on Wi-Fi as the primary access medium.

ADVANTAGEOUS FINANCIAL MODEL

Omnia worked closely with HPE Financial Services to create a flexible financial model to support its business outcomes and provide network service rather than ownership. The company pays an agreed monthly charge to buy the solution as a service



which enables it to align costs to future expected savings and eliminate a large up-front outlay. It gives Omnia the option to refresh equipment when business needs dictate, and frees it from an ownership model with a depreciation cycle.

“One benefit of this finance solution is that we can preserve our cash and use it for advancing our strategic goals. With this option we also get better value for our money,” says Pillay.

Omnia values the security levels of Aruba and is already seeing the benefits of better performing business applications. This has brought a marked increase in the use of VoIP, Skype for Business, the Skype mobile app and Microsoft Lync and that has reduced the company travel bill. However, one of key driver for the digital transformation has always been to make the company IoT ready, and that is where some of its most exciting developments are planned.

Support for digital agriculture

“Improved connectivity has enabled us to conduct some pilots, working very closely with farmers and customers to retrieve their information into our network. We are using IoT to get information from them on things like soil quality, moisture content and patterns of usage, then triangulate it so we can improve our products and the services we can offer,” explains Pillay.

Location-based services are another plus. Security alerts can be transmitted to mobile devices in the event of an accident or disaster, and vehicles can be RFID tagged so they can be directed to the right location in Omnia’s vast Sasolburg site which houses 22 plants.

“I now have a secure network and the user experience has improved because of better performance and signal quality. They are happy and I’m confident that I made the right choice with Aruba,” concludes Pillay.



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