

Schneider Electric Teams with Curvature to Power Worldwide Connectivity and Continuous Innovation

Schneider Electric is leading the digital transformation of energy management and automation in homes, buildings, data centers, infrastructure and industries. The company's flagship product, EcoStruxure™, is an open, interoperable, IoT-enabled system architecture and platform designed to deliver enhanced value around safety, reliability, efficiency, sustainability, and connectivity.

EcoStruxure leverages advancements in IoT, mobility, sensing, cloud, analytics and cybersecurity to provide innovation at every level, encompassing connected products, edge control, as well as applications, analytics and services. With more than 140,000 employees working from 1,100 locations in over 100 countries, Schneider Electric is the undisputed global leader in power management.

According to Dave Kelly, Connectivity Service Line Program Manager for Schneider Electric, a top priority is ensuring that both employees and customers can connect to the services and information they need anywhere, anytime and on any device. "Our purpose is to provide a network experience that fulfills user requirements and expectations," he explains. "We aspire to offer connectivity-as-a-service that is user-centric, talent nurturing, business-oriented and technologically innovative."

The Challenge

To that end, an 80-person global operations team is responsible for deploying and maintaining a high-performance MPLS wide-area network featuring about 95% state-of-the-art Cisco switches and routers. Driven by an overarching commitment to innovation, diversity and sustainability, Schneider Electric is migrating users and applications to the cloud while exploring the benefits of a hybrid networking model using Software-Defined Networking (SDN) and white-box solutions.

"We like to stay ahead of the curve," says Kelly. "Schneider Electric has a dedicated innovation team that keeps pace with the latest digital technologies to ensure both internal and external customers are always connected in support of our 'Life is On' mission." In keeping with its mission, Schneider Electric moved away from regional IT support teams in 2014 to a global model with standardized methodologies and follow-the-sun support. "Our goal is to create a solid framework whereby our end-to-end services run smoothly while delivering all the capabilities to meet any customer requirement," he adds.

Due to consistent, organic business growth and a steady stream of acquisitions and business expansions, the operations team needed to build a cohesive network foundation that connected new locations and increasing numbers of users worldwide. "It was a challenge to integrate all the networking elements for existing and recently acquired companies on the same page," says Kelly. "We needed help with a never-ending list of transformation projects to ease the process of consolidating different network vendors."

Historically, Schneider Electric relied on large services providers, like Dimension Data, IBM and Unisys, as well as Gold channel partners, to assist with deployments, upgrades and ongoing support worldwide. The challenge, however, was achieving a consistently high level of responsive support and expert services at all locations. "What we really wanted was a one-stop shop to handle all our global needs," says Kelly. "But we never really found one company that could do it all with the same level of support and service excellence."

In addition to meeting its standards for quality service and support worldwide, Schneider Electric needed to ensure cohesive, consistent connectivity for all locations and users. "We wanted greater control and more visibility across the network," recalls Kelly. "Standardizing on solutions in keeping with global best practices was critical. We needed a global partner that could help us meet the relentless reality of operations issues, equipment deployments and new projects."

The Solution

To assist with the fast growth pace, Schneider Electric's expert procurement team oversees all hardware purchases, including the predominant presence of Cisco networking equipment. Typically, most purchases and hardware upgrades were predicated by five-year lease terms, but a well-timed call from a Curvature representative to a procurement specialist at a Schneider Electric facility in Barcelona offered insights into a more progressive and flexible path for maintaining the company's global network.

An initial meeting revealed that Curvature's NetSure® third-party maintenance (TPM) would enable Schneider Electric to extend the useful life of its highly reliable Cisco gear well beyond its five-year lease. Moreover, as the world's largest independent IT maintenance company, Curvature clearly had the scope and depth of experience to help optimize Schneider Electric's network investments while improving product lifecycle management. "We saw an immediate opportunity to lower maintenance costs with Curvature," notes Kelly. "Over the course of the next year, the value of using Curvature as an alternative to legacy manufacturer support became obvious."

Not only was Curvature's pricing very competitive in comparison to manufacturer and channel pricing for hardware and services, but the independent service provider exceeded all others in delivery of expedited support. "Curvature's customer service is absolutely the best I've ever experienced," comments Kelly. "Nothing is ever a problem and there's always someone on the other end of the phone to escalate any issue. Response times are great!"

Curvature's worldwide presence was another major plus. "Curvature's global reach is terrific," Kelly adds. "If they didn't already have onsite presence at one of our locations, they were working on it. It became clear we could leverage Curvature's global presence to help address our global requirements."

While Kelly was sold on Curvature's extensive menu of services and proven capabilities, it took a bit longer for internal stakeholders to understand how alignment with one global solutions provider could produce far-reaching benefits. In fact, as Curvature took on ever-increasing maintenance activities, Kelly identified additional opportunities to reap substantial savings and support improvements by bringing other locations under Curvature's TPM umbrella.

Curvature went on to earn company-wide acceptance when Schneider Electric issued an RFP for a worldwide maintenance plan following successful stints with Curvature managing support in North America and EMEA. "This was an eye-opener, as the global support RFP featured stiff competition from legacy providers," recalls Kelly. "Curvature beat everyone while offering 60% savings in an apples-to-apples comparison. We even added more items to the scope and Curvature still produced overall savings of more than 45% over competing bids."

The Benefits

As Schneider Electric's one-stop shop for global network maintenance and support, Curvature is often the first and last line of defense when a piece of equipment needs upgrading or replacement. "One thing that really sets Curvature apart is the actual lead time for delivering equipment," says Kelly. "Curvature delivers in 24 hours compared to the eight to 12 weeks it would take for the manufacturer or Gold channel partners to deliver. Curvature gives us huge agility."

That agility is helping Schneider Electric extend NetSure into the company's APAC locations over the next year. "Looking past the competitive pricing, it's really about the value we get from our whole Curvature relationship that makes the biggest difference," says Kelly. "Dealing with support issues—our experience with Curvature is very, very good service delivery—even if we have a problem with equipment that is not on Curvature maintenance."

Case in point: Schneider Electric suffered a switch outage at a large manufacturing facility near Nice, France in the summer of 2016. The failure, which occurred on a Friday, threatened to impact operations when the manufacturer involved was unresponsive. Then Kelly called Curvature, and the response was immediate, with personnel and a replacement switch arriving the next day.

After working with Schneider Electric's operations team to restore functionality over the weekend, Curvature returned the following weekend to add redundancy to the critical network element. "This went way above and beyond the service you can usually expect," explains Kelly. "And it was very well noticed by upper management as the level of Curvature's commitment never ceases to impress."

A more recent switch failure in the Netherlands was quickly remedied by the Curvature team, even though the equipment wasn't covered under NetSure initially. "Curvature shipped a new switch and restored service in less than five hours," states Kelly. "We couldn't have done that with any other partner or the manufacturer—only Curvature could respond that fast."

In addition to expedited support responses, Schneider Electric has started to leverage Curvature's alternative procurement strategies for additional cost savings on network equipment. The purchases typically entail refreshing incumbent gear that is not compliant globally or upgrades as needed. The ability to purchase pre-owned equipment from Curvature also has enabled Schneider Electric to quickly, easily and affordably meet miscellaneous requests from business units or new locations. Curvature's professional, highly trained services team handles all the requests, working with Schneider Electric's procurement department.

The consistent level of Curvature's advanced technical expertise provides hands-on network analysis, which has proven instrumental in determining service level agreements (SLAs) for every device on Schneider Electric's global network. Moreover, Curvature offers the best options for hybrid support, including SMARTnet and NetSure.

Together, Curvature and Schneider Electric hold quarterly business reviews to further refine networking strategies while identifying potential issues and areas of improvement before they impact operations. Looking ahead, Schneider Electric plans to lean more heavily on Curvature's professional services team to handle ongoing deployment projects, empowering Schneider Electric to focus on strategic network improvements and user experience enhancements.

With Curvature's help, Schneider Electric will build out its own service desk capabilities to align closely with continued business growth and global expansion. "Technology doesn't fix problems; people do," concludes Kelly. "We have such a good, direct partnership with Curvature and will continue to look for ways to use their professional services going forward—they give us a distinct competitive edge."