

Unlocking business agility at Flamingo Group International

Flamingo International secures a more resilient and agile future

Business agility blossoms at Flamingo Group International

ISN designs a Meraki LAN and SD-WAN solution around Flamingo Group's unique deployment needs. Combining robust security, optimal connectivity and cloud integration, the new platform delivers zero touch provisioning and centralised orchestration capabilities.



About Flamingo Group International

One of the world's leading growers and suppliers of fresh cut flowers, house and garden plants and premium produce, Flamingo Group International (Flamingo) supplies leading retailers and supermarkets in the UK and across Europe.

From humble beginnings supplying Covent Garden with fine beans and strawberries in 1982, today Flamingo is a world-class integrated horticultural agribusiness that grows, processes and distributes sustainably produced flowers and premium and prepared speciality vegetables. Its customer base include Bloom & Wild, Interflora, M&S, Next, Sainsburys, Tesco, and Waitrose & Partners.

The group – which comprises Flamingo Horticulture, Omniflora, Afriflora and Bigot Fleurs – employs more than 22,000 personnel in the UK, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Ethiopia and Kenya. As well as farming 1,300 hectares of its own land, Flamingo also works with 900 partner growers in 19 different countries to deliver the freshest products to market every day.

The challenge

As a high-volume supplier of perishable goods, Flamingo's IT infrastructure needs to deliver the continuous and ultra resilient connectivity that is key to ensuring all its flowers, plants and produce reach their destinations in peak condition and in the shortest possible timeframes.

A large and distributed enterprise Flamingo had undergone significant organisational growth, all of which placed significant demands on the existing infrastructure.

"We'd well and truly sweated our old network assets and the ageing infrastructure simply didn't offer the capabilities we needed to mitigate against new security threats or scale up to cope with business growth. Furthermore, each site was configured differently and at some global locations we only have a small local 1st and 2nd line IT support team, all of which made the network difficult to manage and maintain. We wanted to shift to a modern enterprise-grade SD-WAN/LAN architecture that would provide the performance and agility we needed and deliver deep insights into all our operations on a single pane," says Michael Kennedy, Head of Group IT Operations at Flamingo.

To sustain and accelerate innovation and growth, Flamingo wanted to upgrade the core network services – WAN, WiFi and LAN – utilised by four UK sites, various smaller, seasonal pop-up sites, six Kenyan sites, and a site in the Netherlands. It also wanted to end its reliance on expensive MPLS connections that offered limited flexibility and functionality around cloud access, security and application performance.

To realise its infrastructure vision, Flamingo wanted a high level LAN/WAN design from a trusted expert that could be replicated across all its sites.

“As a boutique specialist in this field with deep technical knowledge, we knew that ISN were the right people to engineer the initial master network design,” continues Michael Kennedy.

The solution

Working with key stakeholders at Flamingo, ISN's design and engineering team conducted a detailed assessment of the existing environment and all required operational specifications.

Alongside multi-layered security that included direct secure connectivity to the group's cloud-based ERP environment, standardising the WAN/LAN architectures at each branch location to simplify management was a top priority. The new network design needed to incorporate built in failover resilience to ensure core functionality could be maintained in the event of any WAN outage. This was crucial for eliminating any disruption to the manufacturing and supply chain operations that are so mission critical to Flamingo's highly time-sensitive business.



“Throughout this process, ISN demonstrated a deep understanding of our business and were highly collaborative when it came to sharing knowledge and insights. Their ‘can do’ attitude resulted in a highly optimised network design tailored to our exact needs and with all required built-in redundancy and security protocols,” explains Michael Kennedy.

Most importantly, the new design meant that Flamingo could dispense with its MPLS services, which represented a cost saving of over 60% per year, while benefiting from more bandwidth at a much more sustainable annual cost.

Having ratified the master design, ISN was next tasked with creating a detailed technical blueprint detailing the physical network build components.

“While I was largely technology agnostic as regards the solution we implemented, I trusted the recommendations that came from ISN with regard to utilising Cisco Meraki technologies and asked ISN to carry out this design work too,” states Michael

All objectives met, and with significant cost savings

“ISN helped us with the first site LAN implementation in the UK, providing us with a template for executing the roll-out at all other geographic sites. But their involvement with the SD-WAN switch over in the UK was crucial and it wouldn't have been a success without them,” states Michael Kennedy.

The SD-WAN migration was delivered in a single hit and the new network went live with no major hitches.

“ISN played a key role in preparing the plans for the final implementation project. In the run-up to the cut-over, their team was always available to me – even at 5pm on a Friday. Whether that was handling last minute changes or troubleshooting technical queries, their mindset is ‘let's work this until we find a solution that works for you’,” says Michael Kennedy.

“Expert at delivering enterprise-class solutions yet small enough to care, ISN always put our needs first and foremost. With ISN there's no unnecessary bureaucracy and plenty of straight talking discussion on any technical nuances and issues that are brought to them. During the switchover weekend, their team was on standby for 19 hours straight – that's the level of dedication they invested in getting us into production,” he continues.

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The outcomes

Flamingo now has a highly resilient and optimised global network that has enabled the organisation to reduce its operational expenses while increasing WAN bandwidth and introducing new agility and control.

"All sites are configured identically, the network is segmented for optimal security, and I can now provision and orchestrate the network in real-time and on-demand with ease. Meraki's advanced monitoring tools deliver deep visibility into performance across the extended network infrastructure. As a result, it's easy to remotely see any problems in the network or from users," says Michael Kennedy.

"In a word, we're able to fully support our environment using our own internal teams – rather than having to rely on external network experts. Meraki's easy to use tools mean my team can remotely zoom in and evaluate any issue reported to us by the business, diagnosing exactly what is happening, and why – and in some cases establishing when the problem isn't a network issue at all. And when it comes to proactively supporting the business, we're able to design and implement solutions in a matter of hours or days – something that previously involved many months of work."

Evaluating his recent experience with ISN, Michael Kennedy is quick to highlight the value of their adaptive and customer-led approach.

"When you undertake a business-critical and significant deployment of this nature, you need to be certain you are working with a partner that is adaptable and never loses focus on your end goals. That's exactly why we chose to work with ISN."

ISN solution

- Design an optimised LAN and SD-WAN platform hand-in-hand with key company stakeholders
- Advising on a fully featured technical solution tailored to specific business needs
- Technical Design Services
- Optimised Technical Design

Benefits

- A single, integrated security and networking infrastructure
- Supports all current business use cases and future innovations
- Enhanced network redundancy, resilience and reliability that includes broadband and wireless capabilities and cloud integration
- Centralised management and reporting



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