Manor Farm

Manor Farm: transformative connectivity enables the next generation of ICT

Manor Farm, previously known as Carton Bros, is one of the oldest companies in Ireland, founded in 1775. The eighth generation of the Carton family now runs the business, providing more than 850,000 fresh chickens to the market every week. A revitalised communications infrastructure connecting its multisite enterprise, provided by AirSpeed Telecom, has greatly enhanced the company's productivity and opened new possibilities for strategic uses of ICT.

If you're looking at fresh chicken on the shelves of a local supermarket, you're probably looking at chicken from Manor Farm. All the best-known retailers in Ireland and many in the UK trust Manor Farm for a steady supply of fresh chicken products throughout the year. The company, headquartered in Clonee, Co. Meath and with its factory in Shercock, Co. Cavan, is a truly end-to-end business: working exclusively with its own growers around Ireland, it supplies hatched eggs as well as custom feed from its own on-site mill, and the fully-grown birds are returned to Manor Farm for processing.

Formerly the company relied on a leased line network connecting its administrative offices in Bracetown Business Park, its processing plant and its feed mill, both of which are in rural Co. Cavan. But the low bandwidth and unreliable connectivity were a drag on productivity across the enterprise. After considering its options for a refreshed companywide WAN, Manor Farm selected AirSpeed Telecom to deliver a new-generation solution with better bandwidth to support its growing business.

Transformative connectivity for one of Ireland's oldest multisite enterprises

Today, the AirSpeed MPLS network, using licensed wireless connectivity with built in redundancy, has delivered a transformative level of productivity for the enterprise.

"Our staff really have been blown away by the difference," says Seán Hartnett, IT Manager for Manor Farm. "Over the years we've had many providers offering to deliver broadband services to our administrative offices here in Bracetown, but only AirSpeed was able to give us dramatically improved connectivity and capacity across all three of our sites, as well as a managed firewall service. That's exactly what we needed."

Seán says access to every system across the wide-area network has improved remarkably in responsiveness and reliability, including database and financial systems residing on a virtualised environment at the processing plant. E-mail communication across the three sites is also improved, as the IT team has been able to lift restrictions that were once needed on file attachment sizes.

"For the first time in years, we are location independent: staff can access all systems regardless of whether they are onsite or offsite," Seán says. "The bandwidth restrictions we'd been working under were so severe, that staff had to consider which location they needed to be at, depending on system access requirements. We now have the communication capabilities we need to support our business, and many more possibilities are now opened up to us."

Ongoing management and new possibilities

AirSpeed continues to provide a proactively managed service for the Manor Farm WAN and broadband. Seán says the AirSpeed engineers' expertise during rollout was also invaluable.

"AirSpeed is very focussed on what needs to be done, and very focussed on what we're looking for," he said. "What I really like is that it's a properly managed service: recently the power briefly went off in our feed mill and they were on the phone to us directly. That's exactly the kind of proactivity we need."

Supported by these enablers – the managed network service, the tremendous improvement in network performance and the new managed firewall service– Manor Farm are looking afresh at what ICT can do for its enterprise and are in the process of implementing business intelligence tools which will be location independent. The extremely high-volume nature of Manor Farm's business means that additional insights into customer preferences and demand will be invaluable.

"The chicken industry is actually very complex because there are so many variables. This is a just-in-time business – we don't get the order from retailers until the day before they want delivery – but what we have is a variable, natural product," Seán says. "Excess chicken is a massive cost to the business, so our whole aim is to use data better, remove data silos, and forecast better, so that we can optimise the business."

Seán says, "Before the AirSpeed solution our staff had to think about where they needed to be, now with the AirSpeed network, no matter where they are, they can access the systems they need, and everything is so much quicker."