



RFI TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

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- Drew Auld
CIO, RFI Technology Solutions

THE CLIENT

Founded in Australia in 1979, RFI designs, develops and manufactures high-performance antennas, system components and repeater/rebroadcast systems for a global market. The company also provides wholesale distribution for both its own products and third party components, and implementation services for fully integrated wireless and renewable energy solutions. To deliver these products and services, RFI operates manufacturing facilities in Melbourne and Adelaide, warehouses in Sydney and Perth, and sales offices in Brisbane, USA, NZ and the UK. Since its origins 40 years ago as a manufacturer of two-way radio antenna systems, RFI has evolved into a leading global technology solutions company in Australia.

THE NEED

RFI had been operating with ageing wired and wireless networking infrastructure and a thin client solution that was reliant on centralised computing – technologies that were both approaching end-of-life and incompatible with the company’s strategic direction, which was to migrate IT services and applications to the cloud. The business had also expanded rapidly and diversified its operations, which resulted in a more dispersed team, and a more complex working environment that included a lot more collaboration across the business, both internally as well as with partners and customers.

“We had started using thin client technology 15 years ago, but the cost benefits of centralised management from dedicated data centre infrastructure were no longer there for us. The cost of bandwidth has also come down considerably, allowing us to start moving more services to the cloud,”


- Drew Auld | CIO

By adopting a cloud migration strategy, RFI wanted to move away from its former four-to-five year technology refresh cycle that involved big capital projects, as well as minimising both its data centre footprint and the overheads associated with managing and maintaining that environment.

“Our technology needed to be a lot more responsive to the needs of the business, and also bring innovation to the table to solve business challenges,” said Drew.

Additionally, RFI has seen dramatic growth in the number of mobile and wireless devices connecting to their network and wanted to take advantage of digital technologies to improve systems and processes, particularly in its manufacturing facilities and warehouses. However, RFI had wireless coverage issues within its facilities, particularly in the two warehouses.

We now have five times the number of devices connecting wirelessly than we did a couple of years ago.



“We needed much better WiFi coverage and our existing wireless solution relied on costly WiFi controllers. We now have five times the number of devices connecting wirelessly than we did a couple of years ago, but upgrading the existing solution to keep up with demand required a significant investment in a traditional model. “We also saw a great opportunity to implement innovations like wireless scanners for paperless picking in our warehouses.”

- Drew Auld | CIO

THE SOLUTION

Viatek has been RFI's technology partner for more than 15 years, acting both as the company's managed services provider and also as key advisor on technology, most recently on RFI's cloud migration strategy. Viatek refreshed the RFI network to increase capacity and is gradually decommissioning its data centre footprint in preparation for the migration of key applications to the cloud. Viatek has provided guidance on the migration of RFI's enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems to the cloudbased ORACLE NetSuite solution, which was completed in December 2018.

RFI completed a complete wireless refresh, opting for an Aruba solution recommended by Viatek that met all the functional requirements as well as aligning with RFI's cloud strategy. Viatek implemented Aruba 310 Series access points, providing high performance 802.11ac Wave 2 (WiFi 5) wireless connectivity and a superb user experience for applications and mobile and IoT devices in diverse work environments. The solution is being administered by Aruba Central – software-defined cloud managed networking, removing any requirement for on-premise infrastructure to support the solution.

“ Viatek played an end-to-end role in the wireless project. They proposed the solution after undertaking a full scoping of our requirements to ensure the solution design was exactly what we needed, priced it up based on how we would consume the services, and completed the deployment and cutover, which included training our staff on the day-to-day task of providing secure network access to guest users.”

Viatek also managed a desktop refresh for RFI, moving users from thin clients to HP's small form factor laptops, which also allowed RFI to migrate to Microsoft Office 365 for collaboration, email and file sharing. Secure user access has been assured with the implementation of two-factor user authentication. The migration to Office 365 has introduced RFI users to Microsoft Teams which combines chat, video meetings, file storage, and application integration – and the application is now widely used, particularly with its 80-strong engineering and R&D division, and also the international sales team.

WE'D LOVE TO HELP

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THE RESULT

“With our cloud migration strategy, Viatek is helping us to make value-based decisions and to execute on technology projects to solve business challenges we have.”

By minimising its data centre footprint with the migration of core services to the cloud and operating a hybrid IT environment, RFI has already seen a 30% reduction in support tickets raised.

A key role for Drew and his team is to bring innovation to the table, and challenge the business around what's possible. The wireless refresh project is a good example, where the major benefits of the solution are in providing the platform for RFI to work smarter by transforming processes in its warehouses and also fostering greater collaboration, which extends to its contractors, partners and customers. Drew emphasises that RFI puts value and return on investment (RoI) as the priority, rather than just looking at the cost of a solution.

“For our Aruba wireless rollout, Viatek proposed a solution based on a pricing model that provided the right balance of capex and opex to help us better manage our expenditure. It ticked all the boxes as a solution and aligns with our vision to leverage the cloud. We've got better wireless coverage now – and with fewer access points – and we can easily create secure guest network accounts on the spot.”

The software-defined cloud management portal in the new Aruba solution is also saving RFI tens of thousands of dollars annually compared to the day-to-day costs to administer its former wireless network.

This has been complemented by RFI's migration to Office 365. Users have been given greater local functionality with their new HP laptops, and applications like Microsoft Teams and SharePoint are saving the business hundreds of hours each month just in updating and managing their catalogues and pricelists. It's also generating greater productivity by allowing RFI users to easily share and collaborate on documentation both internally and with external partners.

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THE FUTURE

Drew says that RFI will continue on its cloud migration journey, further reducing its reliance on on-premise infrastructure and minimising its data centre footprint. The next project planned will be the migration of RFI's backup and disaster recovery (DR) to the cloud with Microsoft Azure, generating greater efficiency gains, reducing management overheads and enhancing business continuity and operational risk management for the organisation.