

## **Fiberlink Connects Over 5,000 Auto Parts Stores Nationwide by Delivering Tools for Better Product Provisioning, Billing, and Reporting**

Managing the technology infrastructure at retail locations nationwide is an enormous undertaking for an enterprise -- especially a leading distributor of auto parts with over 5,000 company-owned and franchise stores nationwide.

To find an efficient and effective solution to connect inventory, ordering, and the billing process for each location, this auto parts distributor decided to use a VPN-based solution. Because the company's goal was to get all of the 5,000 locations online in a short amount of time, it soon became disillusioned with its current provider. With ill-managed inventories and receipts from one store ending up at another store, the company was eager to obtain a solution to bring its stores onto a common network and to better manage merchandising, billing, and customer service.

### **The Challenge**

In the spring of 2002, the company was preparing for a rollout of a newly developed automotive parts application suite. Given the stiff competition within the automotive parts marketplace, it was imperative for the company to gain a competitive advantage. To that end, it developed a contemporary suite of applications exploiting the modern benefits of e-commerce processes, Web-based automation, and client-server methodology. These applications enabled participating stores to provide Web-enabled transactional processing with their major customers, and access new inventory management, inventory sharing, and total automotive parts management systems located at the company's corporate data center.

### **Finding a More Comprehensive Solution**

In order to retain its existing customer base and to expand its presence within the marketplace, the company immediately recognized the need to implement its new automotive solutions as quickly as possible. In addition, the existing dial-up Web connectivity at the stores presented yet another challenge. And, bandwidth was only marginally sufficient for a small portion of the company's application suite. Therefore, the company realized that broadband connectivity would afford them the best option for cost and speed.

To increase its time to market, the company needed a provider capable of managing the life-cycle processes associated with a broadband VPN-based solution. Its challenge was to rollout accessibility to its applications as efficiently as possible by choosing a provider capable of supplying a fully managed service that included road-band circuit provisioning, VPN router/FW configuration/implementation, ongoing operations, maintenance, monitoring, and reporting.

### **The Solution**

The company chose Fiberlink's Global Connect (FGC) solution to connect thousands of its participating stores across the US. Additionally, the company uses Fiberlink's Global

Remote (FGR) dial-access solution to enhance accessibility to corporate applications, as its sales teams travel across North America.

To forge the network connections within the company's community, Fiberlink began with 900 company-owned stores – first installing access and then bringing each store onto the company's wide area network (WAN), where all the stores would eventually reside. Fiberlink then brought the company's independently owned stores online by extending security and policy management capabilities to each of them.

In the first six months of the partnership, Fiberlink was able to bring over 800 stores online with managed broadband, and configured, shipped, and installed routers. Fiberlink monitors the sites on an ongoing basis and works with the company's IT staff on any potential connectivity issues. Within 10 months of signing the original contract, Fiberlink helped the company meet its first goal of bringing all of the 900 company-owned stores online. Fiberlink completed this goal six times faster than the company's previous provider had determined and helped save the company time and money in productivity, remote access costs, and management costs.

### **Fiberlink Adapts Its Solution to Meet the Company's Needs**

As Fiberlink expanded into the broader retail shop community, it discovered that almost 80 percent of the company-owned retail locations already had their own cable and broadband connections and really only required Fiberlink's managed services. So, Fiberlink quickly adapted its solution to bring its management capabilities in line with the access plans that these stores already had in place. With this customer-provisioned service offering, Fiberlink was able to eliminate the pain of bringing new broadband to these stores, saving at least one week's time at each location in the company's business productivity. Working with the existing customers also helped Fiberlink quickly install and set up routers to deploy managed services to over 4,000 independently-owned stores onto the company's corporate network.

### **A More Homogenous Environment**

With so many stores coming online so quickly, Fiberlink soon realized that the original router laid out by the company could not handle all of the traffic. In order to bring the company a more homogenous environment, Fiberlink installed a Netscreen concentrator 5200 in the company's headquarters. Now the company can better manage its network traffic and ensure that all parts of the network work seamlessly together for better inventory management.

### **The Results**

Fiberlink's ability to obtain the largest broadband footprint available has enabled the secure connection of 2400 of the company's branch stores. Since May 2002, broadband technologies such as xDSL, Cable Internet, and terrestrial wireless are being used extensively. Where broadband is not available, Fiberlink's dial-VPN solution using a 'persistent' connection method is being utilized as an interim solution until broadband coverage is available. Fiberlink is supplying a fully managed hardware-based

VPN/Firewall device at each of the company's stores to provide a secure and flexible VPN tunneling architecture.

Today, Fiberlink brings approximately 100 new stores online each month. As the number of connected stores steadily grows, Fiberlink and Netscreen together bring the company the benefits of a well-managed corporate network, better inventory management capabilities, faster product turnover, and increased productivity across the board.