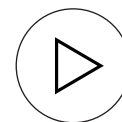




Combined bandwidth from many sources for fast speeds in rural areas



Managed service with Meriplex ended financial and administrative headaches of router maintenance and refreshes



Generated more bandwidth to bring 3D models and streaming video to sales locations

Tilson Homes Deploys VMware SD-WAN with Meriplex to Empower Sales Sites with Rich Bandwidth

For almost 90 years, Tilson Homes has perfected the craft of building custom homes on customers' land throughout Texas. The company's reach extends to 11 sales centers with model homes across the state.

Delivering rich multimedia for successful selling anywhere

Tilson Homes relies on its infrastructure to support 200 employees at two corporate offices for key tasks including estimating, drafting, accounting, unified communications (UC), and IT. The company's sales personnel also depend on the environment to present detailed home plans to prospective buyers at its sales parks.

However, as Tilson Homes rapidly grew and its applications needed to evolve, its aging WAN could no longer keep up with the demanding rich media the company needed to compete successfully in the competitive custom home marketplace.

"For many years, we were running straight T1 lines in all of our locations. Throughout the late eighties and nineties, that was fine, because much of our work was paper-based," said Chris Alarid, Senior Vice President at Tilson Homes. "By the early 2010s, buyer expectations were changing, and we started seeing the need for more social media, 3D modeling, and streaming media at our sales parks. Our existing T1 lines could not provide the performance we needed for increasingly sophisticated media."

TILSON

CUSTOM HOME BUILDERS

ABOUT TILSON HOMES

Tilson Homes is a family-owned and operated company founded in 1932. Tilson is an on-your-land custom homebuilder operating exclusively in Texas. Tilson builds primarily in rural areas and currently serves over 130 counties throughout the state. Tilson has 11 design centers with models located near the Houston, Bryan/College Station, Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas/Fort Worth metro areas. Tilson customers can bring in their own plans or choose from over 40 different home plans they can change to suit their needs. For more information on Tilson Homes, visit www.TilsonHomes.com.

INDUSTRY

Construction

HEADQUARTERS

Houston, Texas



MERIPLEX

ABOUT THE PARTNER

Meriplex helps VMware customers begin their journey to an industry-leading managed SD-WAN solution that unlocks the power of wide area networks. Their solutions offer benefits including complete visibility, analytics, 24x7 proactive monitoring and management, as well as enhanced security controls. Find out more at the Meriplex website, www.meriplex.com.

Tilson Homes initially upgraded to MPLS, but the organization still faced bandwidth and performance limitations for private connectivity to its sites. The company needed a flexible, scalable solution that would enable it to extract the best performance from a variety of WAN connections across its sites.

Reimagining the WAN architecture

To gain the speed and scalability it needed to keep ahead of the competition, Tilson Homes turned to its longtime technology and managed services partner Meriplex. A leader in intelligent network solutions, Meriplex recommended deploying VMware SD-WAN™ as a managed SD-WAN service. SD-WAN lets Tilson Homes use any available links, including public Internet, to provide secure, performance-optimized connections from the branch to cloud.

“Being able to get any type of circuit and treat it as virtually private almost sounded too good to be true,” said Alarid. “VMware SD-WAN enables us to have the true mesh design that we really need for our unified communications components and our applications that are specific to residential construction. It also helps us to lower our capital expenses for routing and other requirements needed with MPLS. The solution gives us the flexibility we need to use broadband, satellite, LTE or whatever we can find at a specific location. We get the bandwidth we need, and the solution is all tied together.”

The new WAN infrastructure supports communication and collaboration between the organization’s sites. With the newly flexible connectivity, sales staff can present 3D models and other materials to prospective customers at any Tilson Homes branch site. Meriplex first deployed VMware SD-WAN at a new Tilson Homes location, and its successful performance inspired Alarid and his team to expand its use across the company.

“We tried SD-WAN at our new Waxahachie office, utilizing fixed wireless in a fiber circuit, and it was fantastic,” said Alarid.



Enhancing performance, capital savings, and the customer experience

Migrating to the Meriplex and VMware solution has set the stage for dramatically improved performance, along with significant cost savings. VMware SD-WAN has enabled Tilson Homes to achieve up to ten times the bandwidth at some sites, without increasing its WAN connectivity costs.

With SD-WAN delivered as a Meriplex managed service, the company has also saved money on maintenance and hardware expenses.

“I’ve got 13 locations, and the maintenance for routers alone at those sites was approaching \$5,000 each year,” said Alarid. “The cost of replacing all our routers every three to five years added another \$30,000 to \$40,000. In overall asset spend alone, I would estimate that our VMware and Meriplex solution has saved us nearly \$90,000 at this point.”

Moving to a managed services model has also enabled Tilson Homes to reduce its operating expenses—and free up its IT team to focus on other key initiatives for the business.

“The VMware SD-WAN solution has been a home run. We’ve eliminated routing assets that we don’t have to maintain and keep up to date every year, and as we grow and stream more content to our sales locations, we can bump up bandwidth with very little effort, which is fantastic.”

CHRIS ALARID
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, TILSON HOMES



“With our ongoing growth, it’s hard to have enough resources and skillsets to manage our WAN effectively,” said Alarid. “With VMware SD-WAN, Meriplex manages the devices, and it’s just a lot simpler to deal with. They maintain the upgrade schedule and software patches when they need to be done, along with all the related tasks. These are headaches that my team no longer needs to worry about.”

SD-WAN enabled Tilson Homes to do away with their Citrix virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) and expensive thin-client hardware in favor of off-the-shelf laptops. The unexpected move to remote work accelerated the process. At sales offices, “It was more cost-effective for us to update to laptops for local 3D process rendering than it was to increase the GPU requirements on the server side to support 3D model rendering,” said Alarid. “We accelerated that change during the pandemic to provide all office employees the flexibility of roaming wherever they needed to in order to work.”

Among the most exciting benefits of the solution has been its ability to provide consistent performance to salespeople presenting in the field.

“Our sales personnel have really noticed the difference,” said Alarid. “Five years ago, they were limited to basic Citrix environments on a thin client, because that was all we could run over those links. As rich media content developed, they needed the ability to show customers 3D models of plans. Being able to reliably get that additional bandwidth without having to spend any more money, and provide support for streaming video, 3D, and other content was a huge win.”

Looking ahead

The versatile VMware SD-WAN solution has provided Tilson Homes not only the trouble-free performance it needs today, but the ability to quickly adjust to market needs.

“This is a hot market, so our number one priority now is geographical growth,” said Alarid. “Our true focus over the next 24 months will be to add at least another three more locations around the state, to try and keep that volume up. We have already started in Waco, and we are planning to extend the SD-WAN there, along with future sites over the next few years.” He noted that when the real estate market changes, Tilson Homes will have the flexibility to pursue growth in different locations.

In a highly cyclical construction market, the Meriplex and VMware solution will continue to give Tilson Homes the business agility it needs to easily modify its WAN to support changing locations.

