

Drakes Supermarkets



Drakes Supermarkets reduces downtime and simplifies backup and recovery for more than 50 retail stores with Riverbed® SteelFusion™

When extended downtime resulting from recurring network outages at its chain of over 50 grocery stores threatened to impact sales as well as customer satisfaction, Drakes Supermarkets, an independent Australian grocery retailer, moved to modernize its communications infrastructure. Riverbed SteelFusion, which removes branch IT from stores and centralises it in the data centre, coupled with a communications network upgrade from BDSL to fibre, has enabled Drakes to dramatically reduce downtime and deliver instant recovery for its retail branches. The operational cost of store outages can be significant, and in Drakes' case, the ability to instantly recover a remote site can deliver savings of up to AUD\$100K per outage.

Drakes Supermarkets is the largest independent grocery retailer in Australia. The business opened its doors in 1974, when founder Roger Drake purchased his first supermarket, a three-lane store in South Australia called Jack & Jill's, which employed four staff.

Today, Drakes operates more than 55 stores across South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, has annual revenue in excess of AUD\$1 billion and employs 6,000 staff. Drakes prides itself on its support of local manufacturers and suppliers, and has kept its focus on the most important aspect of its business—the customer. This is the company's competitive edge, along with its family values and Australian heritage.

In Brief

Challenges

- Frequent network outages threatened sales, customer satisfaction
- Operation of over 55 supermarkets, including phone service, frequently interrupted due to poor connectivity, low bandwidth
- Backups and disaster recovery impeded by out-dated branch infrastructure
- High costs associated with restoring remote sites—expensive IT experts have to travel long distances to troubleshoot

Solution

- Riverbed SteelFusion, the leading software-defined edge solution
- Network upgrade from BDSL to fibre delivered via Telstra

Benefits

- Reduced physical IT infrastructure within retail stores
- Faster, more cost-efficient data backup resulting from the ability to centralise store infrastructure and data, as well as its management in the data centre
- Ability to recover store operations in minutes versus days, saving up to \$100K
- Slashed travel costs as technical repair staff from headquarters are no longer needed onsite

Challenge: Frequent network outages, lengthy downtimes in stores threatens to impact customer experience, bottom line

With a total market value of \$89.5 billion (Roy Morgan) Australia's supermarket industry is a hard-fought battleground. Margins are tight, new competitors and business models are changing the traditional rules of engagement, and every element of a supermarket's operations is under close scrutiny to ensure cost-effectiveness.

With many stores located in remote areas, Drakes was eager to find ways to minimise the negative impact distance was having on its bottom line. The Chinchilla store in Queensland, for instance, is 300 kilometres northwest of the head office in Brisbane. When sites like this go offline unexpectedly, the recovery of operations has been known to take two days and incur financial losses.

When links go down, store operators cannot monitor stock levels to see which products need to be replaced after they are sold, there are no price updates or price changes available, and the stores can't send orders. Head office has absolutely no visibility into what sales are taking place. This means that customers can be charged too little or too much, or there can be delays and inaccuracies in stock replacement, which greatly affects the bottom line to the business and the shopper experience at the store.

“We needed to somehow manage a better connection to each store.”

Craig Flanagan
Drakes Supermarkets' IT Support Manager

With a modest IT support department of eight staff, including just two network support people, remote outages were a constant cause for concern. The company needed a solution that would take the stress out of operating in remote locations by bringing networks back up quickly, with minimal human intervention. Senior Drake executives were pushing for a faster, more resilient solution.

“We had to cut down on network traffic,” says Craig Flanagan, Drakes Supermarkets’ IT support manager. “We needed to somehow manage a better connection to each store.”

Before the Riverbed solution was rolled out, Drakes had 1MB DSL connections at each of its stores. “The bandwidth just wasn’t enough,” says Flanagan. Even when things were running smoothly, the connections at each site were not providing enough bandwidth to support operations. Backup was performed over the network, tying up bandwidth, and not leaving enough capacity for disaster recovery.

“If we were to lose an Internet connection, the store could still trade using mobile EFTPOS, but we had no visibility into what the actual sales items were,” says Flanagan. In a nutshell, Drakes needed its network connected to head office, with a server running 24/7 at each location, with no downtime.

Solution: Riverbed SteelFusion, the market-leading software-defined edge solution

Presented with the challenge of upgrading from BDSL to fibre to increase bandwidth, optimising its WAN and addressing its disaster recovery problems, Drakes selected a unique virtualisation and storage solution delivered by Telstra and Riverbed.

The Telstra piece was an upgrade to two-megabit fibre connections from the previous one-megabit BDSL connections, along with a wide area network (WAN) upgrade. Riverbed deployed SteelFusion solution, a software-defined edge solution, at several of Drakes Supermarkets stores. The solution integrates intelligent storage caching, virtualisation and industry-leading WAN Optimization in a single hyper-converged edge platform to centrally run store apps in the data centre -all optimised across the network for great performance at each store.

“It’s a fairly straightforward implementation. With SteelFusion, we have one physical server running at each store—everything POS related talks back to that particular server in the supermarket,” explains Flanagan.

“It enables us to run virtual services and applications in all of our stores, while centralizing data and leveraging the storage in our central and secure data centre. Not only have we reduced physical infrastructure, but we have greatly accelerated and reduced the cost of remote IT operations.”

Drakes is now hooking up between one and three stores a week to the new system. Fibre has been laid to all sites.

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Benefits: Reduced IT infrastructure, better data backup and ability to recover store operations in minutes versus days, saving up to \$100K

Drakes needed its network connected to Head Office, with a server running 24/7 at each location, with no downtime. With Riverbed SteelFusion, Drakes has dramatically reduced network traffic and optimised data backup operations. IT staff can now instantly push out new services and applications to the front lines of the business, instantly recover from remote outages, and provide the peace of mind that 100% of company data remains protected in the central data centre, without compromising performance at the branch.

Drakes is seeing a “massive” cost reduction as a result of removing the multiple servers and their associated maintenance and licensing costs. There has also been a reduction in operating costs, space and power use. There is no need for backup tapes, and there are fewer moving parts. If they completely lost a remote server, IT staff can restore this server at their data centre and store users can connect to it over the WAN. This was previously unachievable.

“Our initial return on investment is that we know that if something goes wrong we can be back up and running quickly—the opportunity for reduction in operational cost is what sold us,” says Flanagan. “Previously, with the remote Queensland store, we were taking at least two days to restore a lost network and store POS operations which had a financial impact. Now it takes approximately 1 hour to restore.”

The solution has also given Drakes the ability to get new stores up and running quickly, including its Alice Springs store in the Northern Territory, Drakes’ first retail outlet in that remote part of Australia.

About Riverbed

Riverbed, at more than \$1 billion in annual revenue, is the leader in application performance infrastructure, delivering the most complete platform for the hybrid enterprise to ensure applications perform as expected, data is always available when needed, and performance issues can be proactively detected and resolved before impacting business performance. Riverbed enables hybrid enterprises to transform application performance into a competitive advantage by maximizing employee productivity and leveraging IT to create new forms of operational agility. Riverbed’s 27,000+ customers include 97% of the *Fortune* 100 and 98% of the *Forbes* Global 100. Learn more at riverbed.com.

The Riverbed logo consists of the word "riverbed" in a lowercase, bold, orange sans-serif font.