

National Food Services Leader Delivers Reliability

Cisco Borderless Networks
Sligro Food Group Case Study



Executive Summary

- **Customer Name:** Sligro Food Group
- **Industry:** Retail and wholesale
- **Location:** Veghel, the Netherlands
- **Number of Employees:** 10000+

Business Challenge:

- Eliminate outages
- Build greater trust with customers and internal stakeholders
- Help ensure technology foundation can grow with company

Network Solution:

- Replaced unreliable network with end-to-end Cisco Catalyst switching infrastructure
- Cisco Services design and implementation

Business Results:

- Zero problems or outages since deployment
- Improved security
- New business capabilities enabled

Sligro Food Group solved network stability problems by implementing Cisco Catalyst switching infrastructure.

Business Challenge

Sligro Food Group, the market leader in food services and challenger in supermarkets in Holland, has built its business on a promise: when a restaurant, hotel, or other food service customer places an order, that order will be filled on time, every time.

“When one of your most important deliverables is reliability, it is very difficult to explain to your customers when that’s not the case,” says Maurice van Veghel, chief information officer, Sligro. “If we miss our customers’ orders, we can’t just explain that away. It simply cannot happen.”

Keeping that promise, however, requires an enterprise network that delivers 100 percent uptime. And, unfortunately, Sligro’s previous network was not always up to the challenge.

The company had used a Cisco infrastructure for many years, but when a voice-over-IP system was deployed in 2006, Sligro switched to another network vendor as part of a discounted deal. The new network, however, proved to be less than a bargain. For the first time, Sligro began experiencing outages.

“We had all kinds of problems with the network, both with the hardware and with the way it was supported,” says van Veghel. “All of our incoming orders from major customers and all of our communications with our distribution centers depend on this central network. If it goes down, within a few minutes we have an internal crisis.”

“We put the Cisco network in, and from that moment on, we’ve never had an outage again. It sounds like a fairy tale, but that is what happened.”

Maurice van Veghel,
Chief Information Officer,
Sligro

The IT team recognized that the network equipment was behaving strangely, but they could not fully correct the issues. Nor could they get the support they needed from their network partner or the vendor. In most cases, van Veghel’s team was able to compensate for problems before they created major, costly business disruptions. But the situation was far from ideal. Finally, when network services went out for the fourth time in one week, the failure called for a change in direction.

“I walked up to my CFO and said, ‘This is the last time I want to encounter this,’” says van Veghel. “I do not believe this combination of hardware and support will ever give us the performance we need. It’s time to return to a Cisco network.”

Network Solution

In van Veghel’s previous positions leading other large IT departments, he had worked with Cisco extensively. When he received the go-ahead to overhaul Sligro’s infrastructure, Cisco was his immediate choice.

“For me, it’s very simple: you go with the people you trust,” he says. “I had used a Cisco infrastructure for many years. I gained a level of confidence that not only is Cisco equipment excellent, but also Cisco is a company that understands that problems like the ones we were experiencing are simply not acceptable.”

Sligro worked closely with the Cisco Services team to design and implement the new network. For van Veghel, it was essential that Cisco be involved throughout. Cisco Services helped minimize risk, provided access to expertise and best practices, and align Sligro’s IT strategy with its business objectives.

“Cisco was in the lead for our entire design and implementation,” says van Veghel. “I wanted Cisco actively involved, and guaranteeing that this was the network we needed.”

Together, the Cisco Services and Sligro team designed the foundation for a borderless network: an environment that can connect all users and devices throughout the organization seamlessly and securely, with 100 percent uptime.

Building the Network

Sligro overhauled the entire central infrastructure, moving from a single data center to two mirrored data centers linked with Cisco Catalyst® 6500 Series Switches. The flagship Cisco enterprise switching platform, the Catalyst 6500 provides a proven, robust foundation for an “always-available” network, as well as a variety of advanced management and security capabilities. For example, the Cisco Virtual Switching System (VSS) feature allows Sligro to manage the separate physical switches at each data center as a single logical entity.

“We use multiple VSS clusters,” says Rob Maas, network specialist and architect, Sligro. “It keeps the design and management of the network very simple, and more important, highly available.”

At the distribution layer, the company uses Cisco Catalyst 3750-X switches.

“The Catalyst 3750 has proven to be a very feature-rich and stable switch,” says Maas. “We appreciate its simple manageability, and the power-over-Ethernet and Gigabit Ethernet capabilities give us a lot of flexibility.”



Guarding against Threats

Drawing on the security intelligence of the Cisco switching infrastructure, Sligro uses 802.1X port-based authentication to help lock down the network. Part of Cisco TrustSec®, the solution tightly controls access for any device attempting to connect with the network. The Cisco Catalyst switches also provide MAC authentication bypass intelligence, allowing Sligro to control access even for endpoints that cannot use 802.1X, such as network printers.

Deploying the Solution

Working with the Cisco Services team, Sligro was able to implement the new network and data centers smoothly, over a single weekend.

“Truthfully, I can say the deployment was perfect,” says van Veghel. “I had staffed 30 people at the help desk Monday morning to make sure we could address any issues that arose. After an hour, I just told them to go home.”

Business Results

Today Sligro continues to grow its market-leading food services business throughout Holland and to promote its reputation as a highly reliable business partner for thousands of customers. Van Veghel believes that the Cisco network is playing a significant role in solidifying that reputation.

“We put the Cisco network in, and from that moment on, we’ve never had an outage again,” he says. “It sounds like a fairy tale, but that is what happened. My CFO is happy, and I’m certainly sleeping better.”

The improved network uptime and performance are helping to solidify trust in the reliability of Sligro’s technology environment both among customers and internally.

“I made a promise that if we invested in this network, we would never have these problems again,” says van Veghel. “I’ve been able to deliver on that. There are not many companies I would have trusted to make that claim, but with Cisco, I know it’s the case.”

Just as important as delivering a stable infrastructure, Cisco is also providing a support relationship on which Sligro can rely.

“One of the things I appreciate as a CIO is the strong relationships you build with people at Cisco,” says van Veghel. “If I have an issue, I can talk to people who understand my problem. If something goes wrong, I know they are here for me. And when they make a promise, they keep it.”

The Cisco network also provides an intelligent, high-performance foundation for future services and applications. As Sligro continues to move toward delivering secure connectivity to employees anytime, anywhere, on any device, the Cisco network will support all of the security, mobility, and media services that the company requires.

“Sligro is still a very traditional company in many ways,” says van Veghel. “We do not tend to operate at the cutting edge of technology, but I know that Cisco does. So by deploying a Cisco infrastructure, we not only gain an extremely reliable network, we have a foundation we can build on. I will never have a problem where we will want to do something on this infrastructure, and Cisco will say it’s impossible. Whatever our business needs, we will be able to achieve them.”

Product List

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst 6500 Series Switch
- Cisco Catalyst 3750-X Series Switch

Next Steps

Sligro's IT team is already exploring some of the new capabilities that the Cisco network infrastructure can enable. The company is piloting a video-conferencing solution that will allow executives at the company headquarters and key distribution centers across Holland to stay better connected, while reducing travel costs.

Sligro is also deploying advanced Cisco quality-of-service (QoS) intelligence to help ensure that delay-sensitive services such as voice and video deliver the quality of experience that users expect, without negatively affecting other critical network services.

"I know we can go much farther with this infrastructure than what we are doing today," says van Veghel. "Cisco can help us learn from their experience with customers in other parts of the world. As we transition toward a future of a more seamless, borderless operation, I know Cisco will help us get there."

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco borderless networks, visit:
www.cisco.com/go/borderless.

To find out more about Cisco Services, visit: www.cisco.com/go/services



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