



Digital innovator transforms pharmaceutical supply chain with robotic process automation and business-driven SD-WAN

Ascent Health & Wellness drives business performance, efficiency, and resilience with Unity EdgeConnect SD-WAN edge platform with Unity Boost WAN optimization

When visiting the pharmacy, or chemist, most people expect that the medication their doctor prescribed is available, that the shelves are stocked with vitamins, pain relievers, bandages, and other everyday health and wellness products. That's because behind the scenes is a complex supply chain to make it happen—a supply chain that, in India, Ascent Health & Wellness Solutions is completely transforming.

Based in Mumbai, Ascent is a fully digital business, automating everything from order to delivery. Ascent pioneered the use of robotic process automation (RPA) to process nearly 40,000 orders daily, fulfilling them to 35,000-plus pharmacies across India in as little as four hours.

On any given day, Ascent may touch seven million Indian citizens with the health and wellness products



OPTIMIZES CLOUD ACCESS



REDUCES DATA 95%



DELIVERS 100% UPTIME

it supplies. During a global pandemic, the company's digital business model has especially shown its value. Chandresh Dedhia, CIO and head of IT at Ascent, notes, "Since the lockdown due to COVID-19, Ascent is the only pan-India pharmaceutical distributor still up and running, serving its customers."



Applying Boost reduced ERP data by up to 95 percent, improving the end-user quality of experience dramatically. You would not be able to achieve this with any other product or know which traffic is getting optimized and to what extent. Silver Peak gives us that capability."

— Chandresh Dedhia, CIO and Head of IT,
Ascent Health & Wellness Solutions

SD-WAN proves right fit for digital-first business

At its founding, Ascent used the public internet for connectivity, but it simply could not handle the demands of a cloud-first business running RPA, ERP, and other critical business applications. To support and enhance its digital business model, the company wanted to build a stronger, more resilient, and future-proof network, which is how the journey toward SD-WAN began.

As Dedhia and his team evaluated options for transforming Ascent's wide area network, they considered MPLS but it was too costly and lacked

visibility. And they found that site-to-site VPNs would lead to extreme complexity. So, the team decided all-broadband SD-WAN was the right path.

Dedhia consulted with Silver Peak partner, [Hararej](#), and after testing several SD-WAN vendors decided the Silver Peak [Unity EdgeConnect™](#) SD-WAN edge platform was the right solution for Ascent. A key factor in this decision was the optional unified [Unity Boost™](#) WAN optimization available on the EdgeConnect platform, and the ability to create application-specific business intent overlays using [Unity Orchestrator™](#).



"With other vendors, WAN optimization is all or nothing," Dedhia points out. "Boost is very different. It provides application-level acceleration, which gives us the flexibility to choose what traffic to optimize. For each class of application, we can configure a business intent overlay and specify, for example, that our ERP needs WAN opt for the lowest latency and is prioritized for highest availability on the network. Our RPA traffic needs more bandwidth with highest availability. These kinds of fine-grained controls are not available from other vendors and were a major reason for choosing Silver Peak."

Assured network efficiency and stability

Today, EdgeConnect is deployed at Ascent's warehouses and head office, each site terminated with dual, bonded broadband circuits and connected to the AWS environment via the AWS virtual private cloud (VPC) transit gateway. A virtual EdgeConnect appliance is also deployed in a perimeter VPC in AWS.

This architecture creates a full mesh SD-WAN enabling the warehouses and head office to share data directly, as well as access applications running in the AWS cloud. Both the head office and warehouses can also break out locally to SaaS applications such as Google G Suite productivity tools, Google Hangouts for video conferencing, and the Slack collaboration hub. Ascent does not use any MPLS in its network.

Hararei played a central role in advising on and configuring the SD-WAN to meet Ascent's digital business requirements. For example, Ascent has multiple VPCs in AWS, so the Hararei team recommended connecting through an AWS transit gateway. This required working in collaboration with Silver Peak engineers and AWS to ensure the gateway provided efficient, stable network connectivity to the AWS cloud.

"This SD-WAN would not have been possible without Hararei," Dedhia says. "They understood our business and the demands on the network. Yes, we had challenges initially, but there was not a single instance of failure. It's all been very seamless for us, which is due to working with the right partner who has experience with Silver Peak. Hararei took ownership of everything they did from start to finish."

Mark Snodgrass, managing director at Hararei, remarks, "We did some groundbreaking work with Silver Peak and AWS. In the end that extra effort resulted in better-performing ingress and egress with AWS, and a sturdier network overall for Ascent. At Hararei, we believe that we will only be successful when our clients are successful."

Improves performance, delivers 100 percent uptime

Ascent's RPA process is at the heart of the business, pulling data from inventory, customer and supplier databases to automatically generate sales orders

and purchase orders without human intervention. "The speed at which we can execute these processes is critical," Dedhia notes. "The SD-WAN enabled us to adopt RPA and accelerate order processing 10X. Instead of data entry, our purchase managers now have a higher-value function negotiating with pharma companies to improve margins."

With Boost WAN optimization, Ascent has also improved performance for critical applications such as ERP. Remote users previously accessed ERP using terminal services, which was sluggish and frustrating. Applying Boost reduced ERP data by up to 95 percent, improving the end-user quality of experience dramatically. "People accessing the ERP server remotely said the

response was as good as if they were on a local network," Dedhia reports. "You would not be able to achieve this with any other product or know which traffic is getting optimized and to what extent. Silver Peak gives us that capability."

Especially in the midst of a global pandemic, it is vital for Ascent to ensure its operations can continue, without disruption, to supply citizens with the medicines they need.

Dedhia says that downtime resulting from circuit outages, commonplace in the past, is no longer an issue. "Since implementing the SD-WAN, even when one link goes down, our sites stay up and running. We have had 100 percent uptime since deploying the EdgeConnect solution."

Dedhia concludes, "Our RPA project would not have been possible without an SD-WAN architecture. Our success at Ascent is purely because of the digital solutions we developed and the SD-WAN network we implemented."

For more information on Silver Peak and our solutions, please visit: silver-peak.com



Customer

[Ascent Health & Wellness Solutions](#) is a digital healthcare platform for pharmaceutical distribution, transforming the pharmaceutical supply chain in India. Ascent provides a full-stack model across warehousing, logistics, supplies, and credit to connect all the leading pharmaceutical companies with over 35,000 pharmacies. Ascent is the only pan-India pharmaceutical distributor, generating annual gross merchandise volume (GMV) in excess of US \$300 million.

Challenge

Ascent is a digital-first company, leveraging artificial intelligence and automation throughout its business processes and running critical applications in the AWS cloud. At its founding, the company relied on public internet to connect its warehouses and head office to the cloud. However, frequent link failures caused business disruption, with the public network lacking sufficient performance, resilience, and stability to support the company's critical role in the pharmaceutical supply chain.

Solution

After consulting with Silver Peak partner, Hararei, and evaluating a number of SD-WAN vendors, Ascent deployed the EdgeConnect SD-WAN edge

platform at all its warehouses and head office, terminated with dual, bonded broadband circuits and connected to the AWS cloud via a VPC transit gateway. Ascent relies on Boost WAN optimization to accelerate critical applications such as ERP and order processing, leveraging business intent overlays configured through Orchestrator to ensure optimal network resources for each type of application.

Results

- Supports digital-first business, enabling Ascent to maintain essential operations during the global pandemic
- Ensures efficient, stable connectivity from remote warehouses to critical business applications running in the AWS cloud
- Enabled adoption of robotic process automation, increasing order processing speed 10X
- Reduces application data up to 95 percent with Boost, elevating quality of experience for remote users
- Delivers 100 percent uptime to ensure availability of critical pharmaceutical distribution processes reaching seven million Indian citizens daily



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SP-ECS-ASCENT-HEALTH-050520