



MOLE VALLEY FARMERS

Mole Valley Farmers benefits from our software defined wide area network (SD-WAN) as the main technology used to deploy a resilient and scalable network to link their 50+ geographically-spread sites and to integrate their ERP solution.

Mole Valley Farmers was established in 1960 by a group of farmers from the South Molton area in Devon. Since then, Mole Valley Farmers has grown organically and through the acquisition of complementary companies. Their brands include SCATS Country Stores, Mole Valley Farm Select, Mole Valley Feed Solutions and Mole Country Stores.

The group employs **1,600+ people working out of 50+ mills, plants and stores in the UK** supplying a vast range of farming, equine, gardening, home, tool and pet care goods to farmers and the public alike.

Having already linked the many elements of Mole Valley's business with a cohesive, secure and resilient WAN solution that utilised **swcomms'** data centre as a hub to converge multiple network topologies in 2008, they sought further advice from us when they were considering an upgrade.

Mole Valley needed a **more sophisticated solution** to accommodate their new Microsoft Dynamics AX enterprise resource planning (ERP) business management solution and to prepare for the possibility of a future VoIP telephone system deployment. Both solutions would require more bandwidth, lower latency and enhanced connectivity.

Mole Valley required **full resilience** to prevent any loss of service. Security and 24/7 availability remained central to their needs as connectivity is paramount for efficient stock control, production and distribution.

The original interconnectivity solution included the use of MPLS to link the mill sites to the data centre, leased lines for head office and VPN technology to enable the retail outlets to efficiently relay their point of sale information back to HQ and to allow secure connectivity between sites over the internet. The data centre also provided all of Mole Valley Farmers' internet services. Each site also had a redundancy connection in case the primary failed.

The new **upgraded WAN solution uses SD-WAN** to enable easy growth of the existing network and to propel Mole Valley's IT infrastructure into the future while linking sites in even the hardest to reach geographical locations.

The introduction of software definition within the routing means all connections are available at any one time and the decision on which is used is done dynamically on a packet by packet basis, taking account of bandwidth latency and jitter at that precise moment. This means that the network is inherently resilient and can failover between connections even midway through a voice call without interruption, which was demonstrated at the **swcomms** workshop facility before the solution was signed off.

swcomms' data centre has remained a **central part of the new connectivity solution**. As well as being the operations hub for our own ethernet cloud service, it also provides centralised breakout to the internet over multi-homed bandwidth and a direct inter-connect to Gamma providing SIP call traffic which is then distributed over the network to individual branches. Mole Valley are assured of a fully secure and resilient data network, capable of routing voice with full end to end call quality as QoS is assured.

Employing multiple access technologies, like ADSL, FTTC, FTTP, leased lines and 4G, to multiple networks to create a single cohesive overarching network illustrates the flexibility that SD-WAN provides. As a **cutting-edge network technology**, it truly takes network functionality to a new level and delivers options hitherto unavailable. This is especially important when working with sites that do not have access to a full range of connectivity options, which is often the case with rural locations.

“The business has worked with **swcomms** for a number of years and during that time they have become Mole Valley Farmers’ trusted network provider. From a personal point of view, I know **swcomms** is just a phone call away should I require any assistance or need to report an issue.

“I have a good relationship with our account manager and the networks team, and I trust their expertise implicitly. I would have no hesitation in recommending **swcomms** to other large, multi-site businesses and organisations.” Head of IT Arron Watson

Meanwhile, Mole Valley’s IT department benefits from enhanced provisioning with a dedicated mailbox direct to our staff for instant order confirmation and fast track carrier orders. A senior project manager oversees all installations daily. They also benefit from a management web portal to monitor network uptime, bandwidth utilisation, traffic flow and any configuration change history.

Multiple leased lines of varying bandwidths create a high throughput resilient network. Up to 1Gbps ethernet access direct circuits connect the two HQ offices and data centre in triangulation. This **core leased line design** gives Mole Valley the ability to host services at each of the three locations to maximise redundancy.

An MPLS network with DSL tails was provided to many of Mole Valley’s shop locations. Private DSL is also utilised on a failover basis for larger shops and offices as an alternative to the primary leased lines. Because of the SD-WAN functionality, non-wired technologies like 4G are also used both for resilience and in locations when new acquisitions require instant connectivity during the deployment phase.

Internet access is channelled via the data centre meaning that there are a reduced number of penetration points which simplifies security, compliance testing and **protection against malicious attack**. End-user web access is then proxied and protected by Cisco ASA PCI compliant failover firewalls.

The added benefit is that web access can be easily flexed depending on future requirements centrally. Having a central point offering internet access rather than individual links at multiple offices has centralised **web security** and made compliance to standards such as PCI DSS easier to implement and maintain.

It also simplifies the deployment and monitoring of employee web usage policy, providing Mole Valley with the tools to monitor and manage employee web use. Head office web access also can failover between the two HQ locations if required.

Video conferencing has been facilitated by the exceptional low latency and QoS provided by the network. HD **multi-party and point to point video conferencing** suites have been installed at Mole Valley’s headquarters and other sites to cut travel costs, enhance productivity and enable the management team to make quick business decisions. This has resulted in a rapid ROI with further savings achievable in the future.

Using the network for data and video has ensured that Mole Valley has truly leveraged their investment. This low latency, dynamic and high-speed network means real-time applications, such as VoIP, can be deployed to deliver measurable improvements in communication.

Ongoing platinum support provides the total care 24/7/365 support required of a **mission-critical network** that needs to be operational at all times. If engineers are unable to fix the problem remotely, a skilled field engineer will attend the site within four hours.

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