

CenterPoint Properties



SteelHead SaaS Reduces Office 365 Traffic by 63%, Ending Users' Frustrations about Application Performance

CenterPoint Properties is focused on the development, acquisition and management of industrial property and transportation infrastructure. The company invests in major coastal and inland port logistics markets anchoring North America's principal freight lanes. Its portfolio includes 45 million square feet and 5,850 acres under development.

Challenge: Poor performance of Office 365 led to user resistance, lower productivity, and possible financial penalties

CenterPoint Properties is a 110-person, growing company that thinks strategically about IT. Real estate is the company's core business, but IT is critical to the way the company works. For example, employees in CenterPoint's five offices around the US do a lot of videoconferencing using Cisco Tandberg over the company's MPLS network.

Their phone calls go over the network via Cisco Unified Communications Manager. This is also how employees access a centralized, real-estate specific ERP system (Yardi) and a proprietary content management system.

Because IT is critical but not its area of expertise, CenterPoint has decided to transition its IT environment to the public cloud, starting with Microsoft Office 365 for email and office applications, Microsoft OneDrive, and Microsoft Azure. CIO Scott Zimmerman explains, "Given the size of our company, having redundant data centers for our systems that require high availability didn't make much economic sense for us. As such, we are leveraging the cloud, which has built-in geo-redundancy for the same price as hosting a single instance in our datacenter."

CenterPoint's migration to the cloud is happening gradually, and the first employees to make the transition were not happy about it. "In the very beginning, the cloud was slow and they didn't like that," says Beverly Maestas, VP of technology operations at CenterPoint. "We learned not to use the word 'cloud' because that became a big joke around here. People would tell us, 'I don't want to go to the cloud. I heard it's slow.'"

The sluggish performance frustrated users accessing Office 365, who were telling Maestas that they couldn't get their work done. This is never good, but in CenterPoint's case, a productivity decline has potential bottom-line implications since missed deadlines result in financial penalties. According to Zimmerman, "To compete in today's real estate marketplace, our development team has begun to take on an increasing amount of 'completion risk.' As such, there are huge penalties if we can't finish a building on time. We simply can't afford for our technology to fail and adversely impact our bottom line."

Improving the performance of Office 365 became a top priority, and the company addressed the way it had addressed earlier performance problems over its MPLS network—by turning to Riverbed®.

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In Brief

Challenges

- Transition IT to the cloud
- Address users' frustrations with Office 365
- Avoid project delays that could lead to financial penalties
- Support company's expansion by quickly setting up new offices

Solution

- SteelHead CX
- SteelHead SaaS
- SteelCentral NetExpress
- Riverbed Professional Services

Benefits

- 63% decrease in Office 365 traffic after SteelHead SaaS was deployed
- Complaints about Office 365 performance stopped without any increase in bandwidth
- Riverbed Professional Services reduced implementation time for SteelCentral and SteelHead SaaS
- On-going network monitoring and faster troubleshooting with NetExpress

Solution: SteelHead CX, SteelHead SaaS, SteelCentral NetExpress

In 2010, CenterPoint installed Riverbed® SteelHead™ appliances in its data center and all remote offices to ensure good data access and application performance over the MPLS network. The SteelHead solution made it possible for employees to work with large AutoCAD files over the network, for example, without increases in bandwidth.

The following year, CenterPoint installed a SteelCentral™ NetExpress appliance to get application-aware network performance management (NPM) functionality. “Numerous times we wondered why our network was slow, or what caused a spike in bandwidth at one of the remote offices,” explains Maestas. “The online reporting from AT&T [the MPLS provider] was always an hour behind.”

The decision to go back to Riverbed for this solution was easy. The company was very happy with SteelHead. “The integration between SteelCentral and SteelHead also made sense for us,” says Maestas. “We don’t have the expertise in-house to start mixing and matching solutions.” The NetExpress appliance provides packet capture and flow data collection along with analytics, dependency mapping and reporting functionality.

Not long after that was deployed, the company started planning its move to the cloud. Maestas used NetExpress to look at what effect the transition would have on bandwidth utilization. After seeing the increase in traffic that would result, and still hoping to avoid buying more bandwidth, Maestas turned to Riverbed again. “I found out that Riverbed offers Office 365 acceleration [through SteelHead™ SaaS], and I felt that was a better solution,” she says.

She took advantage of Riverbed’s offer of a free trial to evaluate SteelHead SaaS in house. This solution combines WAN and Internet optimizations to ensure accelerated delivery of SaaS applications like Office 365 while reducing the bandwidth consumed to deliver a superior user experience. “I could show my boss a traffic summary report that showed SteelHead SaaS was reducing our Office 365 traffic by 63%, so we felt comfortable making the purchase,” Maestas adds.

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Benefits: Good Office 365 performance without bandwidth increases; faster troubleshooting

Once SteelHead SaaS was deployed, complaints about Office 365 ended. “We had been getting a lot of calls about poor performance, and those stopped,” Maestas notes. “And that was without any increase in bandwidth.” The company finds this solution very affordable.

For less than the price of a tall latte, it can provide an employee with Office 365 optimization for a whole month, and that more than pays for itself many times over with productivity gains in a cloud connected enterprise. CenterPoint began its move to Office 365 with Exchange, then OneDrive for Business and will eventually start using SharePoint in the cloud as well.

CenterPoint had hired Riverbed Professional Services (RPS) for help with the SteelCentral deployment, and found the Riverbed representative very helpful for getting the NetExpress appliance set up and running quickly. Maestas turned to RPS again for help with the Office 365 migration. “I highly recommended Riverbed Professional Services,” she says. “I have a lot of other things to do, and this is not something I do every day, so it would take me a lot longer to handle the migration. We really appreciate the hand-holding we get from Riverbed, both during implementations and on an on-going basis.”

Maestas uses NetExpress daily to keep tabs on network performance. “I keep the NetExpress dashboard up on my computer all the time,” says Maestas. “Each of my SteelHead appliances is registered inside the NetExpress, so I get alerts when conditions fall outside of the range Riverbed Professional Services and I set up initially.” When she sees a spike in traffic, she can drill in and quickly see the cause, which can often be something like an employee streaming Netflix or Pandora.

“I felt like I was chasing my tail in the past because I didn’t even know where to begin to look,” Maestas continues. “A complaint about slow performance could lead to hours or even half a day tracking it down.”

“Riverbed has helped us feel better, move faster, and be more agile.”

Now I can just drill in with a click into my NetExpress and find out immediately what’s going on, or at least eliminate the network.” She also mentioned that one of her assistants, who is not a technical person, also monitors the dashboard. “She knows how to go in and drill in and find problems too. It’s very easy to use,” she adds.

Riverbed products and services have helped CenterPoint in other ways, besides supporting the company’s move to the cloud. For example, Riverbed solutions make it easier for the company to open new offices as it expands into new port cities across the US. “We have a standard setup for each of the offices now,” says Maestas. “Every office gets a managed router from AT&T and a SteelHead appliance, so it has immediate traffic optimization. We don’t wait. We just build that into the cost of every office.”

In terms of the big picture, Maestas see Riverbed’s contribution to her company and its IT environment this way: “Our IT organization is not that big. Riverbed has helped us feel bigger, move faster, and be more agile.”

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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 26,000+ 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, sans-serif font. The letters "river" are in a dark blue color, and the letters "bed" are in a bright orange color.