



Re-inventing SSE Ireland's network for the future

Design and delivery of a Wide Area Network (WAN) upgrade was the latest chapter in our long-standing partnership with SSE. More resilience, capacity, better visibility, and improved service levels were the outcome, as well as an even stronger relationship between the two companies.

Employees

Over 10,000

Company

SSE Ireland

Industry

Energy

Location

Global

Overview

SSE Ireland is a fast-expanding renewable energy business with diverse interests and operations, spanning power generation, retail, wind farms and contact centres. Crucial for the company was building a resilient network infrastructure for its 1,200 staff to work and collaborate across 26 sites, including two business critical contact centres in Dublin and Belfast.

“BT knows us well, and I will always have them at the table to put forward a solution when there are opportunities to discuss.”

The challenge

Like a lot of large companies, SSE was focused on delivering more agility while simultaneously reducing costs. The ‘more for less’ mantra depended on advances in technology and deploying them effectively; a process it had been through in the past with BT Ireland and one it considered renewing again when it came to refreshing its WAN and addressing a number of challenges.

Challenge #1 was resilience in the Belfast office. An outage in 2018 was caused by a single point of failure on connectivity to a UK data centre. This office hosts 100 contact centre agents so going offline was not an option and a revised business continuity plan was well overdue.

Challenge #2 was a requirement for more bandwidth to support the roll-out of a unified communications solution across the company’s UK and Ireland sites. SSE was moving to the cloud with Microsoft 365 and planned to replace an existing conferencing solution with Teams. The new all-Ireland WAN would be expected to carry voice, data and video, as well as provide internet gateways to free up core bandwidth.

The challenge for communications service providers responding to the tender was to achieve the company’s internal mission to drive agility within a tight budget. “We went to market to get the network we needed with cost savings and no reduction in service,” said Morgan Gilbert, IT Service Delivery Manager, Ireland. It was a challenge that BT Ireland was ready and able to embrace.

The solution

We saw off four competitors to win the tender with a re-designed WAN plan, leveraging best available technologies to deliver year-on-year reductions in operational expenditure.

Morgan Gilbert talks about BT as a strategic partner, a testament to a relationship that goes back to 2006. “The diversity of our businesses is something that they have always been able to accommodate,” he said.

SSE needed a network that would deliver maximum application uptime for their users. To ensure this we chose two high-availability technologies: MPLS and Ethernet. To prevent a repeat of the 2018 outage, network diversity was a key part of the solution. At the same time, we improved telephony services by adding a SIP platform to the network, which simplified operations. We then enhanced the user experience by optimising network bandwidth for calls.

The increased use of bandwidth hungry video in the business drove an upgrade in connectivity to all sites from 1Gbps to 10Gbps. This also provided ‘headroom’ for future growth as more network-dependent services come online.

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The result

We delivered a future-proof network that advanced SSE’s pursuit of more agility while meeting demands on performance and value. The long-term relationship between the two companies shows how a partnership can bring stability to a constantly evolving landscape and keep a business ahead of the curve. More resilience, more capacity, better visibility, and improved service levels are built into the new network.

Martin Flynn, BT account director for SSE Ireland said; “We’ve been connecting SSE’s operations since 2006 and the agreement marks the next step in our partnership. We’ll provide a new generation of managed connectivity services; delivering the required choice and flexibility to help SSE navigate their digital future.”

Morgan Gilbert works with many suppliers and is reluctant to score any of them 10/10, because there is always room for improvement. He would, however, score BT 9/10 for service, account management proactivity and responsiveness around incident management. “These are areas that are really important to us and it’s testament to BT that they get a score that not many vendors get from me,” he said.

One of the big differentiators in our response to the tender – and a reason we won – was our commitment to provide a managed wide-area-network, with a 24x7 Managed Service. This coupled with a process of continuous improvement will be introduced over time, with better network visibility and reporting. “BT can help us with our technology roadmap, and we are already talking to them about contact centres and use cases for SD-WAN,” said Gilbert. “BT knows us well, and I will always have them at the table to put forward a solution when there are opportunities to discuss.”

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