

A part of the Spice Group, Saholic.com was incorporated in June 2011. The e-commerce retail company's product range includes mobiles, tablets, laptops, cameras, mobile accessories, and mobile and direct-to-home recharges. The company also provides various services to its customers.

In January 2013, Saholic.com started the Buy Online, Pick Up in Store feature, which allows a customer to purchase a gadget online and then collect the item from the nearest Spice HotSpot store. Similarly, under its On-Time Guarantee facility, the company provides the customer with a gift voucher for every day of delay in product delivery. In March 2013, Saholic.com started offering customers the option of purchasing mobile theft insurance while purchasing a mobile handset from its website. The company also gives customers the option to purchase gadgets on monthly instalments (ranging from 3 to 18 months).

Saholic.com recognised the importance of telecom as a strategic business tool to help achieve its twin aims of achieving greater network transparency and optimising network performance.

tele.net takes a look at the company's communications set-up...

Communications infrastructure

According to Rajneesh Arora, chief executive officer, Saholic.com, establishing a robust and flexible communications infrastructure was a key priority for the company. "Given that the company started operations in 2011, our communications infrastructure is fairly current and up to date," he says.

Broadband forms the backbone of the company's network. Saholic.com uses broadband internet coupled with data cards to handle all its business-related communication needs. "We have multiple 4 Mbps broadband connections provided by Reliance Communications," says Arora.

For internal communication, the company has set up a local area network to connect its computer systems. The company uses Wi-Fi for last mile access, which is available throughout the office premises.

“Wi-Fi connectivity has afforded us several benefits,” says Arora. “The process of setting up an infrastructure-based wireless network requires little more than a single access point. Wired networks, on the other hand, have the additional cost and complexity of actual physical cables running to numerous locations (which can sometimes be difficult for hard-to-reach locations within a building). Moreover, Wi-Fi networks can easily accommodate an increase in the number of users with the existing equipment. In a wired network, additional clients would require additional wiring.”

Another advantage of deploying Wi-Fi is reduced costs. As Arora points out, “The cost of wireless networking hardware is only marginally more than its wired counterparts. This cost is almost always outweighed by the savings in cost and labour associated with running physical cables.”

To secure its network, the company has deployed Linux (Ubuntu)-based systems. “Ubuntu-based systems have two main advantages over Windows and Mac systems,” says Arora. They offer a single comprehensive software updating system. This is possible because Ubuntu has a centralised repository of applications. The third-party applications that make it into the main repository are the ones that have been tested by Canonical (the company that manufactures Ubuntu) and are proven to work with the operating system. Moreover, the Ubuntu Software Center further simplifies the process of managing its software repositories.

From a user’s perspective, the Ubuntu Software Library offers a similar experience to that of the iPhone App Store or Android Market. While iPhone and Android have a mix of free and paid applications, those in the Ubuntu Software Center are nearly all open source and free of charge. Apart from telecom tools, the company also uses several internal applications based on Python and Java.

Challenges and benefits

According to Arora, a key issue faced by the company while implementing the communications infrastructure was to convince employees to use Linux-based systems. However, since then, they have found that Ubuntu machines are as user friendly as Windows-based ones, and they are far safer too," he says.

In terms of benefits, the company's customised communications set-up has helped trim overheads and at the same time given its employees the flexibility to be connected at all times, both inside and outside the office. "We have saved money on our fixed costs by using affordable broadband connectivity, data cards and Ubuntu systems," says Arora.

The way forward

Going forward, as Saholic.com increases its employee base, the company may consider opting for a 3G dongle or data card for each employee. "We believe that the monthly cost per employee can be further reduced by this step," concludes Arora.

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