Simmtronics Semiconductors Limited (SSL) manufactures memory modules of 128 MB to 2 GB, motherboards, graphic cards and the Simmbook. The company has three manufacturing facilities in the country and sales offices in 11 countries. Its client base comprises original equipment manufacturers such as HP, IBM, LG, Samsung, Acer, PCS and Zenith.

According to a joint report by the Indian Semiconductor Association and Frost & Sullivan, the Indian semiconductor industry is set to touch the $8 billion sales mark by end-2011. To keep pace with this growth, SSL decided to overhaul its existing communication infrastructure in order to streamline business processes, match the demand for operational efficiencies and keep competition at bay. tele.net tracks the development of its telecom infrastructure.

Legacy system

Previously, the company made use of a simple IT and telecom infrastructure. Its departments were connected through a local area network and the computers were connected to a single computer, which had limited functionality. In addition, the company made use of plain old telephone systems and email for external communication. Initially, SSL's operations were not widespread, so the telecom needs were relatively simple, comprising telephone lines and "dumb" terminals, which had restricted usage. There was no common platform for data integration among its outlets.

However, as business and competition grew, SSL realised the need for adopting IT and telecom infrastructure that facilitated efficient and contemporary work practices, and optimised workflow.

The shift

According to Indrajit Sabharwal, managing director, SSL, "From simple telephone lines and fax machines, we shifted to pagers and then to alphanumeric pagers. Today, we have an elaborate

set-up with the latest technology in place. Keeping abreast of new technologies and services is a must."

SSL's communications set-up has been developed and is maintained in-house. Its support staff coordinates between its branch offices and manufacturing units. Currently, the organisation has a multi-tiered infrastructure in place, with each component catering to a different requirement. For the wide area network (WAN), for instance, a mix of DLC (local loop), DLC (NLD), IPLC, ISDN technologies and the internet is used. As per Sabharwal, 4 Mbps leased lines helped the company maintain seamless connectivity with its branch offices. The always-on connectivity came at a flat rate giving a clear picture of the communication-related cost. For both national and local connectivity, Bharti Airtel was the preferred service provider.

Similarly, the 4 Mbps ISDN infrastructure helped in videoconferencing, thereby trimming overheads and at the same time offering a convenient medium of communication. Also, the 4 Mbps IPLC connectivity offered several advantages including quick installation, low initial investment, etc. IPLCs were also used for videoconferencing and the internet allowed 1 GB download speed.

For connectivity between the organisation's domestic and international networks, and its head offices, branch offices and factories, several components were used. These included basic mediums like phones, videoconferencing facility and webcams. Sabharwal says, "SSL's factories have installed IP-enabled cameras, which facilitate seamless international connectivity." The company also uses dedicated hotlines and data lines for global connectivity.

To connect to the internet, SSL uses leased lines sourced from Bharti Airtel and Vodafone. Besides, many enterprise applications like web hosting, VOIP, audio- and videoconferencing, email and chat servers are used. VOIP services like Skype are primarily used for coordination between support executives. Executives on-the-go need mobile email, data connectivity and conferencing facilities. According to Sabharwal, SSL's sales personnel are provided with Reliance Communications data cards that enable them to access the company's corporate intranet and any data even from remote locations. The senior executives use BlackBerry devices for the same purpose.

SSL's communication infrastructure includes a data centre as well. It performs several functions such as ensuring server uptime, data recovery and backup, and storage management, as well as supports hardware and network-centric activities.

In terms of software applications, the company uses enterprise resource planning (ERP). The ERP package delivers a single, unified database that contains the data for various software modules pertaining to functions such as project management, customer relationship management, financials, etc. Also, the package contains several modules, which simplifies the company's production processes and makes the supply chain more transparent.

The company uses a relatively simple backup mechanism. Sabharwal says, "Individual backup drives are widely deployed. They are very reliable and cost-effective mediums." For network security, SSL uses standard firewalls and has deployed a two-tier access mechanism, which is password protected. All in all, the company spends over Rs 10 million every year on its communication set-up.

Benefits and challenges

According to Sabharwal, while the firm received several benefits, it did not face any major challenge in implementing the changes in telecom infrastructure. The benefits were reduced overheads, reliable connectivity and a single, standardised platform for all processes. Going forward, he says that the company will be selective in upgrading its infrastructure and will only opt for tailor-made mediums that best suit its requirements.

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