
Case Study

**Fitch Ratings IT Organization
Focuses on Service and Core Capabilities
With the Help of Blue Ridge Networks Managed Services**



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Summary

The IT department at Fitch Ratings responds to a wide range of demands for remote access to email and critical network-based applications from its increasingly mobile end users who have a wide variety of technical skill levels. By utilizing Managed Security Services from Blue Ridge Networks™, the company meets the remote connectivity demands they face with tight security and easy scalability; plus the capability to handle help desk requests around the clock.

About Fitch Ratings

Fitch Ratings is a leading global credit rating agency committed to providing the world's financial markets with accurate, timely and prospective credit opinions. The company has grown rapidly during the past decade gaining market presence throughout the world and across all fixed income markets. Along with Moody's and Standard & Poor's, Fitch Ratings is one of the top three credit rating agencies in the world and issues ratings for thousands of banks, financial institutions, corporations, and governments. They operate about 50 offices worldwide.

Situation

In 2002, Anthony Maceroli faced a changing paradigm in the way his organization's end users were approaching their work. As Managing Director of Information Technology for Fitch Ratings, Maceroli was well-accustomed to managing the technology landscape for a highly information-dependent workforce. The rapid rise of the Internet and the increasing reliance upon email as a primary mode of communication produced a demand for remote access that had the potential to outstrip the capacity of Fitch Ratings' IT infrastructure to deliver high quality support.

"We had a basic, workable solution for remote access, but it was limited to a small number of high-profile users," said

Maceroli. "It was slow and it couldn't support a large number of users. In parallel, we were looking to raise our security profile across the board. The kind of information our users share is very sensitive and proprietary. We have no tolerance for any kind of security breach."

Fitch Ratings sought an offering that would help overcome the technical challenges arising from steady company growth and periodic growth spikes that came as a result of acquisitions. The existing solution could not link multiple locations, and provided users minimal contact with only a portion of Fitch Ratings' IT infrastructure, primarily email. Maceroli wanted to give end-users access to the company's proprietary analytic applications as well as enhance their communications capabilities.

"Most of our infrastructure is located in New York, with the exception of some email, file and print servers that are site-based," described Maceroli. "With multiple locations across the globe already in existence and acquisitions further expanding our requirements, we were looking for a solution that would tie everything together as seamlessly as possible."

As Fitch Ratings prepared to examine the product and service offerings available to them a central issue was the level of

support that would be available to end-users.

“We run Fitch Ratings’ IT organization with a service oriented philosophy. An end user’s experience is what matters to all 80 of us most,” noted Maceroli. “Our analysts – the people who create the credit ratings for the company - need to be focused on companies, industries, and markets; not what makes their VPN connection to the office work. They are used to a high level of service and expect quick access to the resources they require, whether that’s during the business day or on the road at 1:00 a.m. on a Sunday. We were concerned about how to best provide that kind of support and whether we had the resources to make that kind of commitment.”

Approach

Maceroli and his team of specialists within the IT organization’s Network Group researched the products and services available in the marketplace and created a short list of potential solutions. These included offerings from Savvis, Sprint, MCI/UUNet and Qwest. Fitch Ratings also examined the feasibility of building their own VPN by leveraging tools from equipment manufacturers like Cisco.

“We needed our VPN to be extremely secure. We needed it to be scalable. Our users need to be able to get to the ‘guts’ of our organization, our applications, via both broadband and dial-up access. And perhaps most importantly, we needed our end users to be supported around the clock. In the end, Blue Ridge Networks was the only provider that could meet all our requirements as far as both the technology and the service.”

As part of its Managed Service offering Blue Ridge Networks provides 24/7/365 help desk support. In addition, their high security VPN specialists pre-configure devices to client requirements and the

BorderGuard® VPN appliances being deployed, delivering “plug and play” functionality – ideal for non-technical end users. Blue Ridge Networks BorderGuard VPN appliances employ two-factor authentication, which requires not only a password, but also KeyGuard, a physical USB key, for access to networks they protect. They also conduct maintenance, facilitate ongoing updates and assist in network expansion when additional scale is necessary, without ever accessing clients’ actual networks or data.

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It is Maceroli’s belief to outsource functions only when it is more efficient to do so and the organization can maintain control of all its proprietary data. While Blue Ridge Networks’ Managed Services offering seemed to fit the bill, before selection, Maceroli’s team conducted an intensive pilot program.

“It would have been difficult for us to provide end users the around the clock support on our own, so we found Blue Ridge’s managed services attractive,” said Maceroli. “But we also believe in the idea of ‘eating our own dog food,’ of being our own beta-testers – because we always want to experience results for ourselves. During the pilot, I personally called the Blue Ridge help desk at 2:00 a.m. on a Friday and 11:00 p.m. on a Sunday, posing as an end-user in need of support.”

I got through to an actual person in each case who was prepared to help.”

In addition to being satisfied with the level of support received during the pilot, Maceroli also noted that responsiveness during the pilot was a contributing factor to Blue Ridge Networks’ ultimate selection.

”No implementation goes perfectly, and initially, we ran into some issues with speed due to compatibility problems with some legacy equipment. I was truly impressed by how hard Blue Ridge worked to get the solution working within our environment. It made the decision a no-brainer.”

Security

According to Maceroli, while easy administration, service and uptime are all vital considerations in VPN implementations, the key measure of success in any security initiative must be exactly that – security.

”We’ve gone more than three years without a single security breach. No one ever gained access our network that wasn’t supposed to,” said Maceroli. “We went so far as to include the BorderGuard service a key component of our disaster recovery strategy. That’s how confident we are in Blue Ridge Networks.”

Results

Including the pilot phase, the VPN deployment was completed in three months. Additional locations were added and in all, Fitch Ratings now supports over 500 mobile users throughout the United States.

Fitch Ratings’ end users now can access not only their email but also remotely utilize applications such as a human resources system software from Oracle and an accounting system software from Great Plains. Most important, Fitch Ratings users were able to remotely utilize

the proprietary analytical applications that drive their business. The implementation enabled the company to create a more effective work-from-home program, which has been helpful with retention.

As far as ongoing maintenance and support, Fitch Ratings has been extremely satisfied.

”A recent upgrade involved very little effort from our staff – we were able to add a new device to the network by rerouting traffic through another BorderGuard and plugging the new appliance in.,“ mentioned Maceroli. “We literally had zero downtime and the whole process took about 15 minutes.”

Conclusion

In all, Fitch Ratings was extremely pleased with the results of the implementation. Blue Ridge Networks enabled the company to achieve the security, scalability and support it required, without overtaxing resources within Fitch Ratings’ IT department.

”IT should be a service to the business, and this is a perfect example of how good technology can help a business work more effectively,” concluded Maceroli. “Our analysts are now able to work from nearly anywhere in the world, which means they are not only more flexible, but can respond more quickly and deliver better recommendations. In the end, that’s what our business leaders care about most because that’s what our clients care about most.”



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