


POPULAR

Customer Success Story

Giving a century-old business connectivity for the future

With the digital age came the need for connectivity. To drive its continued growth, Popular required a partner to provide a stable, secure and centrally-managed network. This resulted in an effective collaboration with Singtel.

Executive Summary

Company

Popular Holdings

Industry

Retail & distribution, publishing

Business Challenges

- Lack of network backup resiliency plan resulting in downtime when there was an outage.
- Hardware near the end of its life cycle.
- Network not managed on a centralised system made it taxing for human resources when issues arose.

Singtel Solution

- Software-Defined WAN (SD-WAN)

Outcomes

- Reduced downtime as the network was automatically switched to a 4G backup when primary connectivity was disrupted.
- By remotely configuring routers for new network deployment, workload for IT staff was reduced.
- Ability to prioritise traffic to business-critical applications.

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About the Customer

Popular Holdings comprises a series of companies engaged in book publishing, distribution, retail, and electronic learning.

It has roots that stretch back decades, to when book industry pioneer Chou Sing Chu set up a store in Tanjong Pagar to distribute Chinese books and magazines. In fact, 2024 marks Popular's 100th anniversary.

Over the decades, Popular grew into a network of 28 retail stores in Singapore. It also operates in countries including Malaysia, China, Canada and the United Kingdom.

With the digital age came the need for connectivity. To drive its continued growth, Popular required a partner to provide a stable, secure and centrally-managed network. This resulted in an effective collaboration with Singtel.

Business challenges

The operating environment for book retail businesses has changed dramatically since the first Popular bookstore was opened in Singapore in 1936.

It has since transformed its operating model from being a traditional bookstore, to a one-stop shop offering everything from stationary to toys and electronics. Popular has also allowed customers to make purchases online.

However, it faced several challenges.

- There was no mechanism for Popular's headquarters to put stores on a backup network if connectivity failed. This resulted in downtime in the event of a power outage.
- Their equipment was near the end of its life.
- Popular could not manage its network of routers on a central system. As a result, IT staff had to be sent down to physical locations to fix issues. This was taxing on time and human resources.

"We wanted to explore a solution that helps simplify the operational and deployment process across multiple sites," says Ms Ee Siew Ping, Director of Information Technology at Popular Holdings.

The business turned to Singtel, which was already its network service provider, for a solution. "Singtel is our connectivity service provider, so they know and understand our network infrastructure," says Ms Ee. "We had the confidence that they would understand our requirements and manage our needs."

Solution

Popular was already using Singtel's SingNet and Megapop network services.

It subsequently adopted Singtel's software-defined WAN (SD-WAN) offering that allows businesses to monitor and control their network through a single portal.

SD-WAN comes with integrated security functions, including firewall and web-filtering. As a result, network performance is monitored around the clock, ensuring secure connectivity and an uninterrupted customer experience.

The solution also gives businesses complete visibility of their network traffic data, as well as insights, letting them stay ahead of the competition.

Furthermore, SD-WAN can be operated from a centralised management console, allowing businesses to seamlessly adapt and pivot to serve customers better. This supports measures including the fast deployment of technology across sites.



SD-WAN also comes with an in-built sim tray, and has an automatic failover feature to the backup network should the primary circuit fail.

The Singtel team understood what Popular required to run an efficient business. To showcase how the functions will work on a day-to-day basis, Singtel provided a one-month trial of SD-WAN at a Popular store and its headquarters.

Popular quickly found that it benefitted from the SD-WAN offering. "It was a pleasant working experience. There were no overpromises, and we were able to utilise the different features of SD-WAN," says Ms Ee.

Benefits

Popular stores were automatically switched onto a backup 4G network when their primary connectivity failed. This limits disruption to on-site and online operations.

SD-WAN also allowed Popular to remotely configure routers to a new network, when stores were relocated in Singapore.

“If we did not have the SD-WAN service, we would have had to go down physically to the branch site to configure and onboard the network,” says Ms Ee.

“However, with SD-WAN, we could leverage the central configuration right from our headquarters. This made the overall deployment process a lot easier, saving both time and human resources.

“We also benefited from the dynamic path selection function, where we get to prioritise traffic to our business-critical applications.”

Future plans

According to Ms Ee, an effective business relationship needs to meet this key metric – unwavering support – and Popular has found this in Singtel.

Ms Ee says, “When there is a hardware issue that we need to fix, all we have to do is call the Singtel team. A ticket will be logged for us, and the service team will be notified to provide on-site support.”

At times, the Singtel team even rectified issues before being notified by Popular. “Singtel has a strong support service team,” says Ms Ee

“We have seen proactive monitoring from Singtel's end. It detects the issues on its circuits and proactively rectifies them, instead of requiring Popular to reach out every time we face an issue.”

With a bolstered network providing efficiency, oversight, and security, Popular is in a position to navigate a business environment which puts value on a seamless and integrated customer experience.

About Singtel

Singtel is Asia's leading communications technology group, providing a portfolio of services from next-generation communication, 5G and technology services to infotainment to both consumers and businesses. The Group has presence in Asia, Australia and Africa and reaches over 760 million mobile customers in 21 countries. Its infrastructure and technology services for businesses span 21 countries, with more than 428 direct points of presence in 362 cities.

For consumers, Singtel delivers a complete and integrated suite of services, including mobile, broadband and TV. For businesses, Singtel offers a complementary array of workforce mobility solutions, data hosting, cloud, network infrastructure, analytics and cyber security capabilities. Singtel is dedicated to continuous innovation, harnessing technology to create new and exciting customer experiences and shape a more sustainable, digital future.

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