

Jim Ellis Automotive Takes on Digital Transformation with Comcast Business SD-WAN

Dealership Enhances Productivity and Customer Experience Across Distributed Locations

Family-Run Auto Dealership Delivers Industry-Leading Service and Care

The Jim Ellis Automotive Group is a chain of auto dealerships based in Atlanta. Founded in 1971, the family-owned-and-operated organization has 15 locations across Atlanta and the cities of Marietta, Kennesaw and Buford, Georgia. Jim Ellis Automotive has a staff of over 1,000 employees and represents 12 different brands across its dealerships – Alfa Romeo, Audi, Buick, Chevrolet, Genesis, GMC, Hyundai, Maserati, Mazda, Porsche, Volkswagen and Volvo. The company also operates a collision center out of its Atlanta headquarters.

Jim Ellis Automotive began with one dealership, Jim Ellis Volkswagen, in Atlanta in 1971 and has seen significant growth over the course of the nearly five decades since. The organization has steadily added locations, staff and customers in the greater Atlanta area and recently opened its 15th location, Volvo Cars Mall of Georgia, in Buford, with growth showing no signs of stopping.

“The continued success of Jim Ellis Automotive Group is a direct result of the company’s commitment to delivering the best quality in vehicle sales and service,” said Eddie Gonzalez, IT Systems Director, Jim Ellis Automotive. “Access to the right technology plays a crucial role in ensuring that our customers enjoy a high-quality experience at our dealerships, and we are dedicated to staying ahead of the curve. This philosophy has helped Jim Ellis Automotive build a loyal customer base across its locations.”

Network Struggled to Keep Pace with Business Growth, Negatively Impacting Productivity and Experience

Jim Ellis Automotive depends on a fast, reliable and secure network to connect with customers, employees and business partners and support key business applications across its dispersed locations. All of the company’s business-critical applications are located in a private, cloud-based system, including its CRM, inventory management and servicing platforms. Employees depend on reliable access to the system to execute daily business functions and deliver superior customer service. Additionally, Jim Ellis Automotive provides guest WiFi for customers across all of its 15 locations, which also demands a reliable Internet connection.

Situation

- Atlanta auto dealer with 15 locations across Georgia
- Family owned and operated since 1971

Challenge

- Dealership growth was straining Internet bandwidth
- Slow network during high-traffic periods delayed productivity and impacted customer WiFi

Solution

- Comcast Business Software Defined Wide Area Networking (SD-WAN) Service
- Comcast Business Ethernet Network Service
- Comcast Business Ethernet Dedicated Internet

Results

- Better business application performance
- Improved employee productivity and guest WiFi services are enhanced
- Added redundancy for network

The automotive chain was utilizing a 100 megabit per second (Mbps) Ethernet Network Service (ENS) line to connect its 15 locations to the cloud-based dealer management system. Jim Ellis Automotive also had 200 Mbps Ethernet Dedicated Internet (EDI) lines in place at key campuses to support communication with customers and partners, as well as to power guest WiFi. The combination of the ENS and EDI lines delivered a robust connection that met the company’s needs for several years, but as Jim Ellis Automotive continued to expand, it began to experience network congestion. As the dealership added more locations and staff, the growing number of users put added pressure on the network, and accessing the company’s cloud-based system became increasingly challenging. At the same time, the dealership was adopting additional cloud-based applications to which employees needed reliable access, further compounding the issue. Delays in system access negatively impacted customer experience, as employees were unable to service clients quickly, and impeded employee productivity, which produced frustration and complaints from workers across the network. Employees’ inability to seamlessly access the dealership’s business systems was hurting customer relationships.

Jim Ellis Automotive's growing customer base was also putting a strain on the system – during peak periods, the network supports up to 1,000 end users in a given day, with both employees and customers interacting and driving data usage. In addition to drains on employee connectivity, the increased usage was also negatively affecting the guest WiFi experience, another source of frustration for the dealership's patrons.

In addition to employee and customer challenges, general industry advancements were requiring additional bandwidth demands to sell and service vehicles, and the dealership was under pressure to increase its capacity. Finally, Jim Ellis Automotive was also looking for reliable circuit redundancy to help prevent costly outages.

Comcast Business Paves the Way for Digital Business Success With SD-WAN

To address its connectivity issues, Jim Ellis Automotive participated in an early stage Software Defined Wide Area Networking (SD-WAN) trial with Comcast Business. SD-WAN technology enables distributed enterprises to connect VPNs across different sites and have application-specific control across the entire network to manage configurations and policies. It provides greater network-wide management control, consistency and flexibility, without costly hardware, maintenance or labor investments.

Jim Ellis Automotive implemented SD-WAN and paired it with a 100 Mbps broadband connection from Comcast Business across all 15 locations to function in concert with and support its existing ENS and EDI solutions. The automotive chain utilized the SD-WAN to move its bandwidth-intensive applications off of its ENS, which enabled more efficient transfer of those large files and freed up capacity on the ENS line so that its bandwidth could be used solely for primary business processes. As a result, the company's video file transfer has been expedited and the employee productivity and guest WiFi service issues have been resolved. Workers noted an immediate improvement in network speed and their ability to access the shared cloud system, which in turn has helped boost their productivity and enabled them to deliver improved customer service. Since implementation, the dealership has not received one employee or customer complaint about connectivity.

"In a traditional network, traffic follows a specific path that has to go a specific route to a specific device, and it's difficult to optimize," continued Gonzalez. "Instead of simply increasing our bandwidth, we found the SD-WAN solution to be a more appealing option because it allowed us to prioritize the traffic we wanted over a separate network connection and choose the quickest path for that traffic. This enabled us to alleviate a significant amount of internal inter-dealership traffic that would usually have to travel through one circuit and could cause congestion on the network."

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- Eddie Gonzalez
IT Systems Director
Jim Ellis Automotive

Using Comcast Business SD-WAN to augment existing network technology enabled Jim Ellis Automotive to quickly increase bandwidth. The dealership enhanced its overall network architecture, eliminated data bottlenecks and routed specific data throughout the network to better support performance of core business applications. The SD-WAN connection also provides redundancy for the company's ENS, which the system previously lacked. The redundancy made possible by SD-WAN allows employees to service customers even during a circuit failure.

Finally, as Jim Ellis Automotive continues to grow, SD-WAN provides the scalability and flexibility needed to grow with the organization; the dealership has the option to utilize SD-WAN to support an array of systems, including inter-dealership traffic as well as guest WiFi. So, no matter how demands and requirements change, Jim Ellis Automotive can depend on SD-WAN to deliver the bandwidth, cross-branch management, optimization and agility necessary to address its needs.

"The capacity and reliability provided by the SD-WAN from Comcast Business has helped us address our network congestion and route our traffic smartly to both enhance our employees' productivity and deliver an improved experience for our customers," concluded Gonzalez. "Working with Comcast Business has alleviated the stress that heavy traffic puts on our network and has helped us ensure that the network is functioning optimally."