

CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

SAFEWAY, INC. SELECTS HELIUS INC. SOLUTION TO ENHANCE
COMMUNICATIONS & TRAINING CAPABILITIES

Overview

Safeway, Inc. is in the highly competitive grocery business, operating 1,776 stores in North America. Corporate communications and employee training are critical to the success of the company. The Corporate Communications and Media Production Organizations are responsible for developing and executing the delivery of the company's communication strategy to its stores.

Business Challenge

Safeway delivers its communications and training via a blend of satellite and terrestrial-based systems to 1900 locations, including the stores, administrative offices, manufacturing plants, distribution centers and data centers. Much of its programming is delivered live for viewing on televisions in training rooms or break rooms. Additionally, content is provided through web based training. The demand within Safeway to provide more content related to ongoing corporate communications and up-to-date employee training on products, customer service practices and compliance related issues is increasing.

Historically, Safeway has successfully provided effective, timely communications to the field by staying abreast of industry trends, implementing system upgrades and integrating technology enhancements, while leveraging its existing infrastructure.

Last year, Safeway identified the need to deliver, to stores, large data files for the IT department and media rich content for employees to view at their convenience, while maintaining the integrity of its current live delivery and audience interactive capabilities.

Vendor Selection Approach/Process


The initiative to enhance communications and information delivery was led by Dan Pryor, VP of Corporate Communications and Media Production. Pryor and his team conducted an extensive review of the marketplace to see what similar companies were doing and what solutions were available to better utilize the company's existing network (terrestrial and satellite) bandwidth. Based on the findings, Safeway determined that leveraging its satellite network was the best approach. The team identified a number of vendor companies with solutions that met its (minimal) requirements and elected to conduct a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

Safeway then engaged Enliten Management Group, Inc., a consulting firm that specializes in media delivery, to develop the RFP document. According to Pryor, "It was critical to the project that our needs and requirements were clearly and thoroughly articulated. This allowed the process to proceed smoothly for both the Safeway team and the vendor companies invited to respond to the RFP."



Improved Utilization of Bandwidth
Previously on DVB-S1 and MPEG-2, Safeway was transmitting 8Mbps of payload over 9.4 MHz of satellite bandwidth, including two video channels. With DVB-S2 and MPEG-4, Safeway will be able to transmit the equivalent of 12Mbps of payload over the same 9.4 MHz slot. In effect, this will provide the company with 50% more bandwidth utilization.

According to Pryor, "We will actually be able to fit our two video channels into the equivalent of the 50% of bandwidth we will be saving. This will allow us the opportunity to use the bandwidth equivalent required for the original two MPEG-2 video channels (8 Mbps) for streaming video and conducting file transfers."



The RFP was issued to companies that were approved through the initial review process. According to Pryor, “We were quite pleased with the quality of the responses and the enthusiastic, professional approaches by each of the responding companies.” Following system demonstrations and extensive evaluations, the Safeway Team narrowed the field to two finalists.

Over the next three months, Safeway worked closely with the two vendor companies to enhance and refine the capabilities of their proposed solutions to meet Safeway’s specific and unique requirements. In the end, Safeway selected the Helius Inc. MediaGate solution.

According to Pryor, “Both companies were very aggressive and responsive in developing and customizing their products to conform to all of the needs outlined in the RFP. We selected Helius for a number of reasons, including: their ability to execute modifications and changes to their technology; the ease of use of its products for the Safeway users at both corporate and in the stores – the system is easy to control and navigate; and the improved bandwidth efficiencies it provides.”

Pryor continued, “From a software development side, we were impressed with Helius’ ability to incorporate new software and hardware features into its products and demonstrate the enhancements so quickly. Helius reinforced our confidence in selecting them by integrating the agreed upon upgrades into the deliverable product within the contracted time frame.” Pryor added, “Due to Safeway’s experience with other video and IP-based receivers, over the past ten years, we were able to help Helius develop some core functionality that will benefit Safeway as well as other companies who select Helius.”

The Helius solution is based on its MediaGate suite of products including the MediaGate Server and MediaLock Gateway which is located at the Safeway Uplink and the MediaGate Router which will be located at each store location. The Helius MediaGate solution features the DVB-S2 (Digital Video Broadcasting – Satellite Second Generation) standard and MPEG-4 (Moving Picture Experts Group) video compression, which will significantly reduce Safeway’s transmission bandwidth utilization.

“We are excited to partner with Safeway in delivering the next generation of their training and development solution” said Kevin Lawrence, Director of Sales for Helius. “From a vendor’s perspective, we appreciate the opportunity to work with Dan’s team, because they are knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of their requirements.”

Safeway is a self-managed network, but they have contracted with Hughes Network Systems, LLC (HNS) to provide specific support services, maintain the spares inventory and handle equipment repairs.


Delivered Results - Benefits

The upgrade to the Helius MediaGate solution has been successfully implemented throughout the Safeway network, in less than a year from the time that the company identified the need to improve its communications.

Safeway expects to increase the efficiencies of transmissions, rendering a significant benefit to the company through the improved usage of the communications system. In addition, the Helius system provides Safeway with the option to deliver content via its satellite network or over its terrestrial (WAN) network.

By upgrading its satellite system to DVB-S2 and MPEG-4, Safeway will be able to transmit about 50% more traffic than it was able to do over its previous MPEG-2 platform. Working with Safeway, Helius designed and implemented a scheduling system that integrated information from the encoders. This integration allows Safeway to maximize bandwidth usage by filling unused bandwidth with streaming, file transfer and other IP data applications without compromising the quality of their live broadcasts.

According to Pryor, “The Helius system provides the most efficient use of bandwidth that we have ever seen in a satellite system. We are seeing a 140% improvement in bandwidth utilization.”



Each MediaGate Router has the One Touch Systems (OTS) interactive distance learning software built into it, replacing the OTS site controllers Safeway has used for the past five years. With the Helius solution, Safeway maintains its ability to provide live content for viewing on televisions as well as on-demand viewing at desktop PCs.

With the Helius solution, Safeway will be able to manage its network and monitor all activities from the head-end to the endpoints at all stores, including: confirmation that the MediaGate Routers are working; indicators of what is happening at any given time; notifications of system failures; and confirmations of file deliveries. In addition, Safeway will be able to track the usage of the on-demand viewing. According to Pryor, “This is an important feature for Safeway, especially regarding the tracking of training courses related to compliance-based issues and applications.”

Safeway will use the Helius solution to distribute content for the display of signage throughout the corporate facility via its local area network (LAN). At this time, Safeway does not have the need for signage displays in its stores. However, the Helius solution is capable of delivering signage content and will allow Safeway to respond quickly should an application be identified.

Safeway is extremely pleased with the new system, the capabilities and benefits it provides, and the relationship it has established with the vendor companies it selected. According to Pryor, “Mike Tippets (CEO of Helius) made sure this is a partnership between the companies with the goal to find the right solution for Safeway.”

“Safeway has joined a select group of other Fortune 500 companies in providing their employees with a powerful communication and development tool” stated Jeffrey Curtis, SVP of Sales and Marketing for Helius. “It’s important we meet the ROI (Return on Investment) and ROO (Return on Objectives) goals Safeway has outlined with this project”.

About Helius Inc.

Helius provides IPTV solutions for business. Our patented expertise helps organizations implement applications like digital signage, distance learning, and corporate communications. For more information, visit www.helius.com or call Jeffrey Curtis at 801-764-9020.

Products and Services

Helius – MediaGate Router, MediaGate Server with MediaWrite and MediaLock

Hughes Network Systems – Single-Source Service Agreement

One Touch Systems – Interactive Distance Learning solution integrated into the Helius MediaGate Router