



Pic-N-Pac Case Study: Acumera Helped a Multi-Site Retailer Take on Big Network Challenges

Network security and management adds complexity to day-to-day operations. Here's how one retail business with 19 locations is staying ahead of the game.

It may be tempting to think that independently-owned retail businesses avoid the network management challenges of their enterprise counterparts.

The truth is, they often can't. Take cybersecurity. Data breaches at enterprises like Target, Home Depot, or Chipotle make the headlines. However, a Verizon 2018 Data Breach Investigations Report (DBIR) found that point of sale (POS) environments continue to provide rich pickings for cybercriminals. In retail, 73% of all cyber-intrusions targeted POS devices with 58% of those intrusions affecting small businesses.

Independent multi-site retailers are always looking for ways to cut costs and maximize profits from their inventory. They also need to guard against potential cyber attacks. It's important that they embrace changing customer expectations and the ever-expanding number of new digital technologies that are redefining the retail experience.

That was the situation facing Pic-N-Pac (PNP) Owner and Operator Phil Wuest. Pic-N-Pac is a privately held, family owned and operated business. It started back in 1964 with its first convenience store. Wuest currently oversees 15 locations serving customers in Guadalupe, Comal, and Caldwell counties in south-central Texas.



When doing it all yourself is no longer a viable option

Evolving PCI-mandates for network security and a reliance on manual fuel inventory processes was adding complexity store operations. Reaching the limits of what he could do on his own, Wuest was ready for outside help and turned to Acumera to support his day-to-day network security and support. Since 2002, the Austin-based managed security services provider has earned a reputation as a trusted partner for both large national operators and independent retailers with under 30 stores.

By taking on the complexity of PCI compliance and network security and management, Acumera gives their clients back valuable time to focus on serving their customers and growing their business. They understand that the challenges of owner-operated retailers resemble those of their larger customers.

The successful seven-year partnership between Acumera and PNP serves as a useful model for C-store operators who have grown to the point that doing it all themselves is no longer practical or cost-effective.

“ I was just impressed with their reputation. I wanted a technology partner that I could trust with all my stores. They made me feel that I was in good hands and would be taken care of. ”

Phil Wuest, Owner and Operator
Pic-N-Pac (PNP)



The Challenge: “No Way to Run a Business”

Overseeing network operations for stores across three rural counties by himself was affecting Wuest’s ability to manage his business successfully. There wasn’t enough time in the day to maintain and troubleshoot his point-of-sale technology, set up a secure payment network, and support the PCI requirements at every store.

Additionally, Pic-N-Pac’s daily fuel inventory for all his stores was done manually with spreadsheets and stick readings. As Wuest recalls, “It was no way to run a business. I remember it was a manual process to get fuel tank readings with a stick, so the readings were only accurate once a day.”

Before turning to Acumera, Wuest considered purchasing perimeter security firewalls and managing his wide area network himself. After viewing a demo of a leading firewall solution for c-stores, he realized that network design and support was too complex to achieve while also running his business. That’s when he contacted Acumera. After meeting with them, Phil stated, “I was just impressed with their reputation. I wanted a technology partner that I could trust with all my stores. They made me feel that I was in good hands and would be taken care of.”



The Solution

Together Acumera's customer team and Wuest developed a game plan that enabled him to hand off his network design, security, and support to Acumera.

NOC SUPPORT

Today, there is nothing manual about PNP's network operations. He relies on Acumera's 24/7/365 Network Operations Center to proactively identify and resolve potential device or network outages and issues before they affect site operations.

ACUVIGIL™ DASHBOARD

Wuest now looks to Acumera's cloud-managed AcuVigil™ Dashboard to identify any connectivity issues at all his stores. As Wuest likes to say "AcuVigil knows there's a problem before I do."

The AcuVigil™ Dashboard helps reduce Wuest's workload and improves uptime of his point-of-sale system and other connected devices. The easy-to-read, color-coded interface enables him to quickly identify any issues at any location at a glance.

FUEL INVENTORY

To Wuest, it's relatively simple: "If my network goes down, I can't sell gas."

Particularly noteworthy has been the way Acumera manages Pic-N-Pac's fuel data for both his old and new tank monitors. PNP receives automated inventory reports every 2 hours notifying him about low fuel levels, outages, and if there's any water in the tank. Acumera's Tanks App reporting helps PNP determine how much fuel they'll sell at any time of day and has been a big time and money saver for Wuest. No more manual, inaccurate stick tests at each location.

MANAGED FIREWALL

Acumera's merchant gateway sits at every location as the perimeter security device for his entire store network. A secure and powerful perimeter device is crucial as the number of Internet-enabled (IoT) devices connected to the network increases. Each device presents a potential attack vector for bad actors to access and steal point-of-sale data.

Acumera's segmented VLAN network infrastructure integrates routing, security, and centralizes policy management to give Pic-N-Pac a secure network. The cloud-managed platform unifies control of the network through the AcuVigil Dashboard. Additional services, such as the PCI-required scanning tools and web filter that Pic-N-Pac uses, are enabled through apps within the Dashboard.

Wuest is very comfortable "knowing Acumera's firewall, security protocols, and the proactive monitoring by Acumera's network operations center (NOC) keep his network protected and up and running around the clock."

Acumera has saved Pic-N-Pac money on headcount by managing their WAN for them. Without a dedicated, in-house network person "Acumera is like our network and Internet IT guy."

Advice for Independent Operators - When It's Time for Managed Services

Based on their experience working with independent multi-store operators like PNP, Acumera recommends you consider a network management partner when:

Resources

The time spent managing your network has begun to limit your ability to grow your business and serve your customers.

The cost of managing your network internally is exceeding the cost of outsourcing to a managed services provider.

Expertise

You feel you don't have the expertise to keep up with continually changing and growing threats from cyber attacks.

You need help ensuring your operations are PCI compliance, and your customers' sensitive data is safely stored, sufficiently encrypted, and you have the right access controls.

You need help integrating and managing the growing impact of new digital technology and Internet-enabled (IoT) devices in your network.

Troubleshooting

You're finding that being reactive best describes your maintenance and IT support. You wake up every day and ask yourself: "What's not working?"

You want to be informed of an issue before it becomes a problem and customers are inconvenienced, or worse you lose the ability to take payments.

Inventory Levels

Your processes require manual input that limit your ability to monitor supply, efficiently forecast demand, and ensure adequate inventory levels.

