Customer stories

Port of Antwerp converts new Port House into modern mobile workplace

At a glance

1,600
Approximately 1,600 employees are employed over different departments

500
500 workplaces Employees now work everywhere in the building and are able to make maximum use of the alternative workplaces in the building

9
9 floors each floor has at least 2 small data rooms from where all cables run.

As an autonomous municipal company, Port of Antwerp is responsible for the efficient day-to-day operation of the international port. Port of Antwerp manages and maintains all the docks, bridges, locks, quay walls, and of course, the waterways in the port area. On top of that, the company makes land available to industry, logistics and maritime transhipment. Together with all these partners, Port of Antwerp works on a sustainable environment to further develop its activities. To meet the demands of a rapidly evolving maritime market in a flexible way, they contracted SecureLink to convert the renewed Port House, the head office, into a mobile workplace.

"I always compare the port with a hotel: when you go to a hotel, you want a good room, good service and proper handling of your costs. Well, when a ship arrives at the port, it must be able to enter that port properly, with strict agreements, a smooth handling, and it must also be able to leave that port quickly. This is a short summary of what Port of Antwerp does", says Robert De Maere, telecommunication manager of Port of Antwerp. To achieve this, there are many different functions and responsibilities. Approximately 1,600 employees are employed over different departments: shipping management, concession management, infrastructure, marketing, towing service, legal services, etc.

Challenge 1: Continuity

IT is becoming increasingly important in the management of the international port. This is, among others due to the abundance of data. Robert De Maere: "We have to handle radar data, AIS data, logistical data, numerical data as well as data of our different customers. The aim is to centralize all this data in a neutral platform where developers can use this data to create a so-called 'smart harbor'. This ranges from a transparent overview of shipping traffic to managing the locks remotely."

The telecom department plays an important role. It is responsible for the network and the nautical software. Everything concerning radar, radio, and video is managed by this department because it is so specific in the handling of shipping movements. "One of our principal challenges is continuity", says Robert De Maere. "After all, the port is operating at full capacity night and day, 365 days a year. We need to guarantee this continuity."

This is why MPLS-technology (Multi-Protocol Label Switching) was chosen at the time. "Maybe this is slight overkill for an administrative environment, but because we work with these nautical, radar, radio-over-IP and video applications - with 500 digital HD-cameras on the network- we also opted for this reliable technology in the new Port House", says Robert De Maere.

Challenge 2: Mobile working

At Port of Antwerp, there is a process called OVERSTAG. "This process allows people to work with laptops. Laptops which, on the one hand, let employees be more mobile in the building, and on the other hand they can also take their laptops home, thus making their jobs location and time-independent.

This project had to be implemented together with the new switches", says Robert De Maere. "In other words, it wasn't just a hardware problem, it was also a configuration, implementation and topology challenge."

Challenge 3: crucial timing in new Port House

A third challenge was the timing of the works in the new Port House, the iconic building designed by the world-renowned architect Zaha Hadid. Robert De Maere: "We determined that as many as 500 of the 1,100 digital workplaces in our company would be in this new building. This was the perfect opportunity to take a closer look at the existing infrastructure and compile neutral tender specifications with a maximum opening to the industry."

One of the main criteria in these tender specifications was the delivery period. "I often compare our department with a skilled plumber. When you are building a house, he is always one of the last people to be called in, but without him, you don't have running water. Well, computers can't work without a network. Together with our partner, we were only given a month and a half to set up the entire installation in this building with its 9 floors and 500 workplaces. SecureLink gave the best guarantees and respected them too. This was a decisive factor in the contract."

The switches and all other equipment are spread across the whole building. Each floor has at least 2 small data rooms from where all cables run. In another location, all the data is concentrated and injected into the fiber optic network. We also chose to incorporate Wi-Fi in the new network.

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Robert De Maere | IT Manager

"Despite the holiday period, our own people and the SecureLink team managed to install everything within the requested deadline of a month and a half. Even our new CEO congratulated the internal team and our partner because this complex job was rolled out in such a short amount of time", says Robert De Maere proudly.

Work wherever you want to

The result is that end-users are able to log on everywhere now with their laptop, both in the building and at home. Switching between the fixed and the Wi-Fi network is also seamless without the need to log on again. "Our employees stay connected while moving through the building. We still don't have any exact figures about the improvements, but I believe we are twice as efficient and effective now", says Robert. "For instance, in a meeting, everyone is able to open and project a graph. And when agreements are reached during a meeting, they are typed out immediately and all participants receive a short overview of the action points when they leave the meeting. We used to say: the report will follow, but it could take a while."

Employees now work everywhere in the building and are able to make maximum use of the alternative workplaces in the building, such as resting places and separate chairs where they can be alone to finalize a job. "The new system currently implemented in the Port House has an enormous added value because everyone is more mobile now. People are more likely to open a laptop to solve a problem."

A partner you can build on

Port of Antwerp contracted SecureLink to integrate the project. "You can also buy equipment from a box mover. But apart from the installation of the equipment, you also need support, you need to be able to follow training courses, you need to be able to talk to people at the supplier who know your problem and your infrastructure and are able to help you immediately. And that is, as well as respecting the strict deadline, of course, SecureLink's added value", concludes Robert De Maere.

About Orange Cyberdefense

Orange Cyberdefense is the expert cybersecurity business unit of the Orange Group. As Europe's go-to security provider, we strive to build a safer digital society.

We are a threat research and intelligence-driven security provider offering unparalleled access to current and emerging threats.

Orange Cyberdefense retains a 25+ year track record in information security, 250+ researchers and analysts 16 SOCs, 10 CyberSOCs and 4 CERTs distributed across the world and sales and services support in 160 countries. We are proud to say we can offer global protection with local expertise and support our customers throughout the entire threat lifecycle.