Maintel



CASE STUDY

Enhancing Connectivity with Currys

Maintel is partnering with Currys to provide the outstanding connectivity and telephony its customers and staff expect and deserve.



Currys is Europe's leading omnichannel tech retailer. A household name in the UK with 296 stores and significant online presence, Currys is now increasingly focused on IT, gaming and mobile technology.

Its annual revenue in the UK and Ireland is around £4 billion.

At a **glance**

The issue

The rapid growth of SaaS and increased capacity demands from in-store devices & applications meant that Currys' centralised network model had become a barrier to optimal performance, while its unified communications platform was also out of date.

The project

Maintel has helped Currys complete a strategic transformation of its network design, moving to Maintel SD-WAN & a new, fit-for-purpose LAN & WiFi infrastructure. The project also involved updating security and improving network management, visibility and ease of support, using the latest cloud-based software. A further strand focused on voice telephony and UC.

The outcome

A more resilient, efficient and secure network, that provides the high-performance internet and private connectivity needed in stores (including a new guest WiFi solution), delivering increased agility as part of the company's customer experience transformation journey. This supports Curry's vision to 'help everyone enjoy amazing technology'.

Their **Background**

Currys plc is a leading omnichannel retailer of technology products and services, operating online and through nearly 300 stores in the UK and Ireland. With roots stretching back to 1884, the group employs 14,500 people. The company's vision is to help its customers choose, afford and enjoy amazing technology however they choose to shop with Currys.

To help realise that vision, Currys offers a range of services to customers in-store, including device configuration and setup that allows customers to walk out of a Currys shop with their new tech working in a way that suits them. In a select number of stores, it also has dedicated gaming arenas, featuring big screens, surround sound and the latest releases to trial. Its online services are equally diverse, with ShopLive allowing customers to video call in-store experts for product advice and ongoing support.

The **Challenge**

As a tech-focused business, Currys needs its own network to deliver outstanding performance. But two key trends have changed the demands the business places on that network. The first is the rise of Software as a Service (SaaS), which Currys has embraced across the group, as a means to optimise customer service and lower ongoing costs. The second has been an increase in the number and complexity of services the company offers in-store (including flexible finance), which require exceptional connectivity at the network edge.

The previous network lacked the capacity, agility and scalability that Currys now needed. With the contract approaching expiry, the time was right to transform the network, taking advantage of the rapid evolution in networking technology to reduce complexity and total cost of ownership (TCO).

To meet these requirements, Currys recognised it needed to move away from its long-established centralised network model, which was creating bottlenecks and unnecessary cost and complexity. It wanted a more flexible solution, that would allow certain changes to be made without delay or compromising its necessarily robust security policies. It also wanted greater visibility of network and application performance, so that it can continue to optimise connectivity and understand patterns of demand to further improve the customer experience (CX) in-store.

Why **Maintel?**

Currys had been working with Maintel as an important support partner for some time and recognised that the Maintel account team had a deep insight into the business and its needs. Aware that Maintel had helped other organisations with multiple distributed sites transform their networks, Currys invited Maintel to propose a strategic transformation to modernise the Wide Area Network (WAN) in line with its broader strategy.

Maintel devised a three-phase transformation plan[PR2.1], built around migration to a Maintel SD-WAN, which removed the need for branch traffic to be routed through a central point. This had been a significant restriction on the old network. Instead, SD-WAN would provide store-level internet breakout and cloud-based security. As well as removing capacity constraints for store-level connectivity, the SD-WAN solution also ensures optimal performance and minimal latency for the growing number of internet-based solutions & in-store applications used within the retailer's operations.

Reflecting Maintel's understanding of Currys' current setup, the solution also addressed concerns around existing firewalls, LAN switches & in-store WiFi access points that were reaching end of life or lacked the required capacity.

The **Solution**

The first phase was the introduction of Maintel SD-WAN, which uses software to implement routing policies for all traffic across multiple different links. Crucially, it does this dynamically, meaning that the most efficient and reliable path is chosen for each application and each instance. There is automatic failover and dynamic load balancing, so performance is optimised for applications where latency is an issue – from internal collaboration tools to customer-facing video chat. Security is supported through cloud internet firewalling and content filtering.

This phase also included the introduction of a centralised network management solution, which not only provides more insight into performance but supports rapid configuration of new devices and services. This means changes can be implemented far faster, while the risks of doing so are reduced.

The second phase was focused on LAN modernisation, to reduce concerns around end-of-life equipment and streamline support costs in the process. Upgrading connectivity for other sites and 3rd party hosting locations was also critical to the successful migration; the same principles were applied, with Maintel replacing legacy VPNs with VPN tunnels over the SD-WAN.

The third phase involved replacing the WiFi infrastructure in stores via new WiFi 6e access points. This has provided improved coverage and better WiFi performance across all areas of the store, with an enhanced experience for both colleagues and customers. For example, it has enabled Currys to introduce electronic shelf-edge labelling, providing instant access via QR codes to detailed product information. It also gives store colleagues greater ability to stay in contact across a store – for instant, responding to stock check enquiries in real time rather than having to call a customer or contact centre colleague back.

From the perspective of IT, the solution brings a simplified network architecture which is now dynamically managed via a cloud-driven portal. The technical debt and any security concerns from end of vendor hardware support are removed.

The same ethos of modernisation and simplification was at the heart of a subsequent workstream to transform telephony and unified communications across the whole estate. The introduction of Maintel RingCentral provides a high-quality cloud solution both in store and at distribution centres and repair sites. Maintel ensured full integration with the headset solution used by the in-store staff, joining up the different communication channels to deliver a consistent experience.

> Maintel's programme focused on successful store pilot migrations first: by focusing on the in-store experience, confidence was built in the business for the rest of the programme. The Maintel team were able to react quickly to any teething issues to ensure minimal impact to the business.
>
> **James Barlow,** Principal Technology Lead, Infrastructure & Cloud Team, Currys

What are the **benefits?**

From the moment the SD-WAN went live, Currys could instantly see the benefits of moving to Maintel's SD-WAN solution and those benefits continue to grow as business demands evolve.

There have been noticeable improvements in both the customer experience in-store and online, as well as colleague experiences of using key IT systems in their everyday work. Applications respond faster – so customers can see new devices operating to their full potential and stores can manage more simultaneous video calls. Store manager feedback has been positive, especially from WiFi trial stores where a "vast improvement to performance" has been reported. Valuably, support calls from stores (or proactive monitoring) have reduced by almost 30% since the SD-WAN & LAN implementations.

Security is now streamlined: all traffic is routed through cloud security solutions rather than central on-premise firewalls. This reduces the burden on the firewalls and means unnecessary hardware can be removed from stores, while allowing more granular and nuanced security provision based on centrally defined policies that can be updated instantly to address new threats. At the heart of the solution, the new network management layer is providing deeper insight into performance, allowing the Currys team to identify if specific applications are affecting the overall experience, as well as simplifying the configuration and roll-out of new services.

The consolidation of contracts, backed by SLAs and Maintel's new commercial modelling, has meant, and will continue to mean, a lower TCO & a much reduced burden on the Currys internal IT team who are saving hours each week on tasks such as monitoring and everyday provisioning / change.

All of this means the Currys network is now more efficient, as the available resource is being used in an optimal way, and that risks are reduced while customer satisfaction – both from external and internal customers – has increased.

Similar benefits have been seen in the voice telephony, where the quality of the Maintel RingCentral solution is matched by its flexibility. Centrally managed, it offers remote configuration – a major upgrade on the legacy system, which required configuration changes to be made in every store individually – and fixed costs, as well as vastly enhanced analytics. Greater call control & visibility has enhanced the ability to serve in Customer Service Centres (CSC's) in particular, where telephony features are more complex.

The solution has also been rapid to deploy, with some sites needing to be brought live within 1-2 weeks from inception of the request. In a cyclical fashion, this solution also benefits from the wireless access point refresh.

Maintel

Solid Solutions for a Dynamic World

Maintel is a communications managed services provider. We empower our clients across the public and private sector to deliver mission critical services and achieve their workplace, service and customer experience goals.

We consult on the design, deploy and manage network infrastructures, platforms and software, including our own, that keep ongoing operations running smoothly and dependably, protecting business as usual, at the same time being flexible enough to adapt.

When customer, employee, the general public and regulatory expectations are ever-changing, choose Maintel. We provide progressive, solid solutions that help you succeed in a demanding, dynamic world.

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We provide solutions that are not only robust but also adaptable and responsive to the ever-changing nature of the world around us.

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