

Fast Growing Trees sees business blossom by embracing enhanced connectivity

How Spectrum Business helps the world's largest online nursery watch over inventory

At a farm in Fort Mill, South Carolina, acres of trees stand ready for shipment to homeowners across the United States. It is part of a vast assortment of plant life which has made Fast Growing Trees the world's largest online nursery, with over 1.8 million customers who value the quality and variety of its products.

Maintaining such a unique, flourishing enterprise requires a commitment not only to ecology and the natural sciences, but to technological innovation. This commitment is seen in the partnership Fast Growing Trees enjoys with Spectrum Business.

"We focus very much on scalability," says Scott Taylor, Senior Network Engineer, Fast Growing Trees. "When I look at ways we could expand our connectivity network, I prefer to have all my eggs in one reliable basket. That's how I see Spectrum Business."

Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI) supported by Ethernet circuits and backed up by Wireless Internet Access gives Fast Growing Trees better control both at Fort Mill and at their Charlotte, North Carolina headquarters. To help Fast Growing Trees better monitor onsite operations and ensure employee safety protocols are always strictly observed, over 60 cameras were set up in various parts of the Fort Mill property.

A strategy for connectivity

Increased bandwidth was the immediate need when Fast Growing Trees first sought out Spectrum Business for ways to improve its onsite connectivity.

Initially the discussions centered on their Charlotte headquarters, which manages operations. As discussions continued, it was decided revamped connectivity was also needed at the Fort Mill farm to help track inventory and better coordinate how various aspects of the business are run.

"We saw it was a good move for us to be able to link up our two office centers," Taylor explains. "We know that as we grow and scale, we can potentially push this out to other locations, too."

[Dedicated Fiber Internet](#) was installed at the 40-plus acre farm with Spectrum Business supervision. To back up their internet connectivity in case of a sudden power disruption or other emergency, Fast Growing Trees entrusts [Wireless Internet Backup](#) to keep their network online.

To make sure the offices, greenhouses and fulfillment center at the farm were all linked together and communicating, a secure private network was built. Due to the size of the property and excessive costs to connect their



Tracking inventory when that inventory grows outdoors requires special technology. For Fast Growing Trees, the world's largest online nursery, dozens of Spectrum Business cameras are deployed around their Fort Mill, South Carolina farm.

Client profile



Fast Growing Trees

Company

Fast Growing Trees

Industry

Retail

Services

Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI)
Cameras
Ethernet Services
Cloud Connect
Wireless Internet Backup

Overview

- Fast Growing Trees, the world's largest online nursery with over 1.8 million customers, needed to boost connectivity and improve its workflow to keep pace with its expanding business.
- For closer oversight of its many acres of plants being readied for shipment and overall farm operations, they sought the expertise and partnership of Spectrum Business.

Outcomes

- Spectrum Business installed high-speed Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI) circuits at the Fast Growing Trees headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina and its farm in nearby Fort Mill, South Carolina.
- To enhance connectivity at the Fort Mill farm, three Ethernet circuits were installed onsite to maximize coverage and support WiFi onsite.
- The installation of 60-70 cameras at Fort Mill helps the business track shipments, enhance onsite security and keep closer watch of inventory going in and out of the location.

Why it matters

- Fast Growing Trees can better monitor their widespread operations and keep deliveries on track with the connectivity of Dedicated Fiber Internet.
- Making informed decisions about everyday operations and ensuring proper protocols are followed for employee safety and supply-chain integrity are supported by the installation of cameras in key locations.



Connectivity at the Fort Mill farm location is maintained with a Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI) circuit and three Ethernet circuits. "As we grow and scale up, we can use this backbone as the basis for further expansion," says Scott Taylor, Senior Network Engineer, Fast Growing Trees.

building using a wiring contractor, the Spectrum Business team provided [Ethernet Services](#) in an Ethernet Private Local Area Network (EP-LAN) configuration to connect these buildings. This allowed Fast Growing Trees to extend their LAN without having to take on excessive capital costs or maintain separate internet and firewall services at each building.

While Taylor's IT team manages their own WiFi network, Ethernet helps carry their WiFi signal across the Fort Mill site. "Our WiFi is distributed through our internal networks, and through local area networks run from the Ethernet," he says.

"When you are fulfilling thousands of orders a day during our peak season, and you've got greenhouses and warehouses producing some 10,000s plants for shipment, having the right connectivity service is a must."

- Scott Taylor, Senior Network Engineer,
Fast Growing Trees

With more Fast Growing Trees business being run over the cloud, a more reliable and focused connectivity platform for managing orders and otherwise capturing data was needed. Spectrum Business installed [Cloud Connect](#).

Taylor explains, "Cloud Connect gives us that extra layer of connection from our physical sites to our managed site. It's used for everything, and it also means more reliability. If one of our virtual private network channels happens to go down, I know I have another reliable source."

Cameras to keep everything in view

One advantage to updating connectivity at the Fort Mill farm is the ability to leverage it to install network-accessible cameras at strategic locations.

"It's really hard to have eyes on everything as far as addressing the need for employee safety, the well-being of our products and equipment, and just making sure we are following day-to-day protocols," Taylor says. The cameras also record and store video, so it can be viewed later.



Having Spectrum Business handle both his connectivity services and cameras pleases Scott Taylor, Senior Network Engineer, Fast Growing Trees: "That helps us with scalability, which has been at the forefront of our thinking since we began building out."

Spectrum Business offers a variety of camera types. Together, they provide exceptional clarity, 180-degree views, continuous fields of vision across different distances and the ability to zoom in on details like faces and license plates. Some are even set up with night vision abilities. Each communicates directly with a network portal operated and maintained by Fast Growing Trees.

The camera project began when Spectrum Business crews worked with Taylor and his IT team to set up some 20 cameras on the Fort Mill property. Soon, the crews were back to set up another dozen cameras. Still more would be added later.

"It started off we wanted to cover certain areas, then it just expanded as we realized how well it was working," Taylor says. "The challenge was in figuring out the best locations, and then angling the cameras to get the most optimal views."

Today, some 60-70 cameras are set up at the Fort Mill site, monitoring everything from shipments to and from the location to worker

compliance with all Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines. Taylor is happy to leave maintenance of the cameras in the hands of Spectrum Business, allowing him and his team to focus on other IT matters.

Taylor was especially impressed with how well Spectrum Business managed the intricate challenges of installing the cameras, whether it was laying out 300 feet of cable fiber to far-off areas or placing them high up for overhead views: "Getting the cameras set up in just the right way took a good little bit of work, but we got it done, and I'm loving it."

"Having Ethernet allows us to keep traffic from our remote locations off the public internet since we are using the connectivity backbone provided by Spectrum Business."

- Scott Taylor, Senior Network Engineer, Fast Growing Trees

A partnership built on reliability

Across all services and solutions, Taylor's biggest concern is summed up by a single word: reliability. He calls that the "main component" of the technology partnership he enjoys with Spectrum Business.

The IT team at Fast Growing Trees knows what to do when it comes to installing critical network components like switches and access points. But for cameras, they look to people like Gary Baltzell, Sales Engineer, Spectrum Business, to visit the site and ensure the cameras always work correctly.

"Cameras can be very tricky, especially when they are exposed to outdoor factors, whether it be lightning storms or squirrels," Baltzell says. "Scott and his team look after a large campus with a lot of buildings and a huge infrastructure. They don't want to deal with camera issues, too."

Philip Prete, Account Executive, Spectrum Business, calls communication a valuable tool in building success with Fast Growing Trees.

"What sets us apart is if you've got an issue, we're going to take it head-on," he explains. "We're going to make sure whatever the issue, it gets fixed, and we're not going to stop until we know the client is happy."

Reliable connectivity matters a great deal to Fast Growing Trees. Thousands of online orders get processed each day at the Fort Mill farm during peak growing season. This can put a strain on even the most efficient operations. Having Spectrum Business fiber circuits backed by a deep commitment to service means a lot to Taylor.

"The main thing is ensuring our staff is able to work at full capacity with the internet service we need, to



In the warehouses of Fast Growing Trees, different plants are kept in different areas to ensure optimal growth. “We cater and tailor the environments to particular species,” notes Scott Taylor, Senior Network Engineer, Fast Growing Trees. “Cameras help us see it is always done right.”

get those plants out and our orders fulfilled,” he notes. “Having that backbone of fiber and Ethernet always working for us has been essential to our growth.”

Keeping the future in focus

As Fast Growing Trees eyes other locations for harvesting plants and expanding operations, Taylor expects connectivity and cameras to be part of the planning.

“I know we’d like to expand,” he says. “The name of the game is making sure we always have enough inventory to fulfill our customer’s needs.”

“We love the fact that our camera system is covered under warranty; we can call support and have items replaced and service whenever we need it. It takes a load off our shoulders.”

– Scott Taylor, Senior Network Engineer, Fast Growing Trees

Fast Growing Trees sell a wide variety of plants, from conifers to fruit trees, shade trees, evergreens, shrubs and palms. The Fast Growing Trees website organizes distinct parts of the country into “growing zones,” pinpointing for each visiting customer which trees and plants are best suited to their specific location. These are being grown and cultivated at Fort Mill, either in open fields or special greenhouses.

Even Taylor, who grew up on a farm, is surprised by just how many different types of trees he sees at Fort Mill. He calls it a “unicorn spot” for its suitability for so many diverse kinds of plants.

In less than two decades, Fast Growing Trees has gone from a backyard business to a massive online delivery operation, forging a new market for the horticultural industry. The more they succeed, the more Taylor sees the value of Spectrum Business as a technology partner:

“Having one place to go if I have to get a camera updated, a circuit looked at, or if there is a need for expanding connectivity is a nice feeling to have. Being able to deal with the same people for all my needs, I’m all for that.”

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