Insurance provider achieves savings and speed via the cloud

How Safety National keeps critical data up to date with Spectrum Enterprise Cloud Connect

Safety National, an insurer that prides itself on quick responses whenever a crisis threatens a client, needed to act fast as a service provider's bankruptcy threatened to disrupt their existing data storage.

"We were looking at either this huge spend upfront, refreshing our equipment and our data storage location, or doing it for much less in the cloud," explains Brent Gossett, Core Infrastructure Manager at Safety National. "With the cloud, not only do we not pay for refreshing our equipment, but we only pay for storage space we are using."

But for a major insurance company with a strong reputation for client service and top credit ratings, working in the cloud meant finding a partner they could trust. Gossett knew they already had a longtime connectivity partner who had a cloud solution that seemed exactly in line with his needs. So, he made a call to Spectrum Enterprise.

Being ready if disaster strikes
At the heart of operations at Safety National are backup systems that retain, protect and update data. The process of updating these records in case of the sudden loss of one data collection point is a contingency known as "disaster recovery," or DR for short.

A co-location provider had just filed for bankruptcy. Because Safety National used this geographically distant co-location firm for DR purposes, Gossett and his team needed to find another way to protect their operations.

"It was evident early on that the company was going to sell off their business in pieces and parts," Gossett notes. "We were not willing to stand by and wait for that to happen, so we investigated a move. At that time, it was a question of whether we wanted to move to another co-location provider or did we want to take this opportunity to move to the next level, the next phase?"

Cloud migration is a long-accepted reality in today's business environment, yet insurance companies have been slower to embrace its advantages given regulatory and security concerns. But the efficiencies of cloud technology are increasingly hard to ignore: scalability, speed and cost.

Jim Gaines, Enterprise Spectrum Major Account Executive, worked with Safety National through the process. "Like many of our clients, they were thinking 'I've got to do this, but I have cloud hesitancy,' probably because it's new territory for them," Gaines says. "Partnering with us made this very efficient and very quick."

When a co-location firm's struggles challenged Safety National's DR contingencies, the answer was found in a cloud solution from Spectrum Enterprise.

Client profile

Company
Safety National

Industry
Professional Services

Services
Cloud Connect
Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI)
Ethernet Services

Spectrum
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Overview

- Safety National, an insurance provider, needed an immediate, cost-effective solution to their disaster recovery needs when their current co-location provider faced impending bankruptcy.

- Spectrum Enterprise, already the Safety National source for ultra-high speed fiber connectivity, introduced Cloud Connect as an innovative, cost-effective solution.

Outcomes

- Greater agility and the ability to scale up resources are among the advantages Safety National gets from Cloud Connect.

- Control remains within Safety National as Cloud Connect makes them less reliant on third-party data centers.

- Security controls and workflow are managed more efficiently from their St. Louis headquarters.

Why it matters

- The ability to rely on the cloud for preserving disaster recovery (DR) data means less reliance on co-located facilities, with a subsequent reduction in costs.

- Projects that once took weeks now take hours, while storage costs are less as Safety National no longer pays for space it is not yet using.

- Using Cloud Connect, Safety National was able to avoid substantial replacement costs when storage equipment kept at offsite locations became outdated or obsolete.

Safety National now performs its own data replication on a more massive scale than ever before, with Spectrum Enterprise Cloud Connect and Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI).

Setting up a private on-ramp

Safety National needed a connection to the cloud that gave them enhanced security and control, both critical concerns for the large insurer. Gossett and his IT team wanted to decide on what data to move, when to move it and the intricacies of their own cloud architecture.

Cloud Connect offers all this, without coming into direct contact with the internet itself. "We provide a private on-ramp to the cloud," says Richard Hoffman, Spectrum Enterprise Sales Engineer. "It's private and more secure, while having a direct circuit into the cloud itself."

For Gossett, "Using Cloud Connect we were able to avoid paying several million dollars to replace physical equipment coming to end of life at offsite locations and created a cohesive framework for managing data in the cloud."

> ## "I believe our infrastructure has become a lot more flexible with Cloud Connect."
>
> **– Brent Gossett, Core Infrastructure Manager, Safety National**

"We are able to do the same process with our cloud circuit that we do with the circuits connecting to our eight branch offices," he says. "We don't have to treat them differently or have a different device for managing each. It's all contained within the same equipment, the same configurations."

This offers not only operational simplicity, but less skill-set strain on his busy IT team.

To make the move to Cloud Connect an easy transition, Safety National would need the connectivity and bandwidth offered by ultra-high speed fiber. Spectrum Enterprise had already installed Dedicated Fiber Internet (DFI) to the Safety National headquarters in St. Louis and all its branch offices. There was extra capacity that could be used for their planned expansion to the cloud.

"The extra capacity in the existing fiber circuits were the impetus of us saving a lot of money with branch office connectivity," Gossett notes. "We were also able to improve the usability of our branch offices, increase their connectivity speed, and then also provide resiliency."

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Safety National finds saving information to be both easier and less expensive by migrating their data via Cloud Connect.

For the ability to fully control what goes into the cloud, and in a way that can be managed from a central location, Safety National invested in Spectrum Enterprise Ethernet Services.

"Ethernet allows us to shape that traffic going into the cloud, route it where we need it to go," Gossett says. "We are also able to put some quality-of-service monitoring on it. Not only does Ethernet give us flexibility, it allows us to keep using the same equipment we already have in our data center. We don't have to procure a bunch of new hardware to get a new circuit installed. Cloud Connect simplifies things for us."

Investing in a power surge
Cloud Connect replaced Safety National's first conduit to the cloud, a VPN over circuits which had turned out to be too slow.

"We realized very quickly it was not sustainable," Gossett says. "We needed a direct private connection to the cloud and Cloud Connect is the solution that gave us that. The first circuit we had worked well, allowing us to replicate 250-plus terabytes from one place to another."

Keeping data current is a constant process. The pace at which data is updated, its "change rate," is unrelenting. This is especially true if it involves as many different types of clients, insurance agreements and regulatory frameworks as it does for Safety National.

"Some of our systems produce a very high change rate," Gossett explains. "It became evident we needed to increase the bandwidth, just to satisfy that change rate."

Within several months, Safety National upgraded the capacity of its Cloud Connect solution to give it more than double the bandwidth it had before. This has also translated into faster speed when getting things done. "In the past, it could

> "It was great to have a partner like Spectrum Enterprise to manage our circuit installs. We didn't feel like we had to be the ones driving it, which was nice."
>
> **– Brent Gossett, Core Infrastructure Manager, Safety National**

take a week to get a project underway," Gossett says. "Now it's hours, sometimes minutes. Cloud Connect allows us to be a lot more agile when it comes to infrastructure."

A partnership stands the test of time
The partnership Safety National enjoys with Spectrum Enterprise was at the heart of the decision to choose Cloud Connect.

"We had a tight timeline," Gossett notes. "Spectrum Enterprise was really good at working through the process, helping us ensure where we had our workloads replicating in compliance with our backup policies before we pulled the plug on the co-location facility."

Gaines says his group of engineers and technicians embraced the challenge:

"The Spectrum Enterprise team was extremely responsive and showed all the same concern that Safety National had toward meeting that deadline. One thing our competitors tend to do is miss deadlines. We do everything we can to hit them."

An early challenge was working out data flow responsibilities with their cloud service provider. "We ran into some things on their side, requirements that they had, which Spectrum Enterprise was great at working through," Gossett remembers. "That was the biggest hurdle we had to jump through. It was nice to have the help from Spectrum Enterprise to get that done."

The sky's the limit
In addition to enjoying unmatched scalability for DR backup, Safety National is also using Cloud Connect for other purposes, including application programming interface

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The Safety National IT infrastructure is much more flexible than before, due to the scalability of Cloud Connect and other Spectrum Enterprise services.

(API) functions to speed up day-to-day operational processes and cloud-related analytics.

Hoffman remembers warning Gossett that others at Safety National would jump at the chance to work in the cloud once it became available: "I told him the floodgate would open when they knew they could touch it. He was using it at first to move data to alleviate that first data center being closed, but he also had people who were then building cloud instances and moving data around in there, which caused his projection for bandwidth to exceed what he thought."

"We ended up with no disruption to our business moving our data storage from a data center to the cloud, and I would attribute that to the flexibility of Spectrum Enterprise. Working with Jim and his team to straighten that out on the business side was very helpful."

– Brent Gossett, Core Infrastructure Manager, Safety National

The initial Cloud Connect circuit, offering bandwidth speed of up to two gigabytes per second, was more than enough to manage the quick and careful transfer of data from the exited data center. But the success of that project encouraged Safety National to use Cloud Connect for even more of their data storage. Within a few months, it was realized they needed a bigger circuit, able to carry up to five gigabits per second.

"One great thing about Cloud Connect is its scalability," Gaines says. "You get tremendous capacity as well as the option of adding even more capacity when you need it."

Gossett notes that there is still reluctance among other insurance carriers toward using cloud technology, but thinks once they see the agility it brings, that hesitancy will recede. He is already looking ahead at what else Cloud Connect will make possible.

"We do have another project, to add cognitive services for analyzing mail," Gossett notes. "We are using the Cloud Connect circuit for that. An insurance company our size gets a lot of postal mail and being able to sort through and send it to quickly route it within in our systems is important."

Gossett also sees potential for using Cloud Connect in interfacing with Safety National's network of independent insurance brokers. "We see it as a channel for helping the flow of data, getting policies quoted quicker, and just in general lubricating the friction of doing business with them."

About Spectrum Enterprise
Spectrum Enterprise, a part of Charter Communications, Inc., is a national provider of scalable, fiber technology solutions serving many of America's largest businesses and communications service providers. The broad Spectrum Enterprise portfolio includes networking and managed services solutions: Internet access, Ethernet access and networks, Voice and TV solutions. The Spectrum Enterprise team of experts works closely with clients to achieve greater business success by providing solutions designed to meet their evolving needs. For more information, visit enterprise.spectrum.com.

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