NETGEAR Switches

Review From A Customer

From IT Central Station, the leading review site for enterprise technology solutions.

Review by a Real User

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Operations Manager at DLL Technologies

WHAT IS OUR PRIMARY USE CASE?

This particular unit controls all of the fiber optics coming in from each of our buildings for the property that we are managing.

HOW HAS IT HELPED MY ORGANIZATION?

At this particular facility, what they had was a Cisco router coming in, and then a gigabit switch. That switch went out to these 10 x 100 fiber optic switches, which were outdated. That bottlenecked the whole network at the network room, and then it went out to a media converter, and then to a gigabit switch, and then it went out to the clients' routers inside their homes. It was a pretty complex network. The idea was to find the right product so I could eliminate all of those extra pieces and devices and the troubleshooting that went with them, and pare it down to only two pieces of equipment. The right equipment was the NETGEAR M4300-96X. It allowed me to be able to troubleshoot much quicker. It allowed the operations to be very seamless. As far as remoting into it goes, it is very efficient because I can do it from anywhere, through the remote software. I can get right into it, I can change settings really quickly, if a customer needs to add another device into it or if I need to make changes on the VLANs which we created. Another great function of this particular switch is that we have roughly 100-plus VLANs running through it and it's never had an issue. No hiccups, nothing. It just works like a well-oiled machine. It has saved us a lot of time and money and it allows our customers to be more efficient and save money too.

WHAT IS MOST VALUABLE?

The most valuable feature to me is the modular side of things, being able to replace a module and a transceiver at our beck and call. If something goes down, or a piece of equipment is broken, I don't have to replace the whole switch. I can just replace the part that's broken or the part that is no longer working. I can get them back up and working within a matter of minutes, versus having to replace everything and reprogram everything. It's a huge time-saver. The switch itself actually works fantastically. Getting into it works well, the console works well. The console user interface is very easy. A "question mark" is the big key to that whole console. If you don't know anything, it actually walks you through what to look for and how to look for it, when you're in different sections of the console. Besides the modules, the software and the web interface, are actually very easy to use. They

make life, programming, and everything very simple.

WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT?

Right now I'm working with their technical support. When the power does go out, or if we do a soft shutdown, some of the transceivers or the monitor don't recognize when it turns back on, so I have to physically unplug it and plug it back in and then it works. We're working with NETGEAR's engineers to figure out why that's happening. Besides that, everything else is working great. It's on a UPS so it hardly ever goes down.

FOR HOW LONG HAVE I USED THE SOLUTION?

Less than one year.

WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT THE STABILITY OF THE SOLUTION?

The M4300 is a workhorse. It works extremely well and it's very efficient. Besides the little problems that we still encounter when it powers off and powers back on, as long as the UPS stays working, it's never really given me any problems. I would purchase it again, absolutely.

WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT THE SCALABILITY OF THE SOLUTION?

The scalability is endless. Anywhere from putting in the gigabit ethernet ports, which we do have in the switch, to setting up full fiber optic 10 gig ports through the transceivers - depending on what fiber you're running - it is fully scalable. It can be very inexpensive or it can be very expensive depending on how much you're putting into it. But even at that point, it's going to do the job and probably better than most Ethernet switches out there.

HOW ARE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT?

Tech support is phenomenal. They've been great. They've always been there when I've needed them. They've called and remoted in if I needed them to look at certain issues. They've been wonderful. They've always performed at 100 percent for me. They've always been great to me and our company.

WHICH SOLUTION DID I USE PREVIOUSLY AND WHY DID I SWITCH?

We took over this job and the solution that was there was probably the worst design I've ever seen. It was pretty much bottlenecked at the network and bottlenecked at each building in the complex. They were maxing out at 90 megs when there were 250 megs going through the full network. We removed the media converter and the gigabit switch and got a full NETGEAR GS110, which has the fiber optic transceiver input. We had the ethernet ports on it too so we didn't have to use two pieces of equipment, just the one. We programmed VLANs and it works flawlessly. I've never had any issues with any of them.

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HOW WAS THE INITIAL SETUP?

For this particular property that we're working at, the setup was pretty complex because you can't have them all talk to each other. So the initial setup was making sure that each building has a specific IP address and a VLAN so that each person and each unit can't see the computers on someone else's network in a different building. Before I even designed the network I talked to NETGEAR's tier-three or tier-four engineers about how to make this work properly, and they were very helpful in making the setup easy. The two pieces of the puzzle were that the switch was very easy to work with, and the firewall where we had to make sure that the policies were in place. But once they were in place, setup was actually really easy. For 270 units, it took us less than a month to install it, and get it programmed, and up and working 100 percent. In terms of implementation strategy, I designed it in my computer system first. I took the layout that we got from our monitoring software, which basically monitored all of the different pieces of equipment there were on the network, and it looked like a big spaghetti bowl of networks going east and west. That is not what a network is supposed to look like. My design was to make it look like a Christmas tree, with one point where the internet is coming in, and then it reaches the firewall, and from that it goes to the switch. From the switch it goes out to all of the different little switches, and then from the little switches, it reaches the customers' routers. It's like a "family tree" type of design where you have the main point and then it just starts trickling down, versus going from one point where the internet is and then just spreading out east and west. With the old setup, there was no real way to troubleshoot the network. I made a simple to design from Point A to Point B, Point B to Point C, and then from Point C it goes out to all of the different points throughout the network, which was VLAN'ed out to each building. Then, each building has its own IP address. It was very easy once I understood how it's supposed to be set up. We have a lot of different clients in various units, like a stockbroker or a financial person, so we had to lock down the network and make sure that no one else could see what they're doing and make sure that they didn't have cross-communication between each building. I wouldn't say you have to be an IT expert, but you definitely need to know what you're doing. You definitely need to understand the concept behind the functionality of what the switch can do, especially VLANs and making sure what type of traffic is going through the network and through the firewall, so you can make sure that the communication is tagged properly. You should have some years of experience working on a network like that in order to put it in place. I don't think a beginner would be able to get it to work efficiently. Even me, as a professional who has been in the industry a very long time - for over 15 years - it still took me a little bit of time to make sure that it was set up properly, by talking to the engineers to make sure that the functionality was working like it's supposed to. We got the deployment done with two staff members; for the actual switch itself, one person is enough, easily.

WHAT ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM?

It was just us, just our company. I did the full implementation myself. When I ran into any issues or needed to some questions answered I reached out to NETGEAR's engineering staff and they helped me.

WHAT WAS OUR ROI?

We saw a return on investment immediately, as soon as we implemented the system, because we weren't going onsite to troubleshoot the existing problems. Being able to design it from scratch and utilizing good equipment allowed us to show the client that, in the end, we can cut back on our hours. We don't have to be there all of the time, which will save them money. And the time saved allows us to do other projects for them, which we're doing now. I would say it has saved us about 30 to 40 percent.

WHAT'S MY EXPERIENCE WITH PRICING, SETUP COST, AND LICENSING?

When it comes to price-to-performance of the solution, overall, it's outstanding. That's one of the reasons I designed the network this way and chose this particular device. The overall cost was not that expensive compared to some of the competitors out there. Add to that the usability and functionality. And being able to troubleshoot the switch if there is a problem is so much easier because it's a modular switch. There are not too many modular switches out there. The pricing is phenomenal. It's not only good for the company providing the solution, but the customer gets a good deal too. There's a good profit margin for the business to be able to resell it to a client or to offer a good price to the client. It's a win-win for both the company providing this particular equipment to the customer and for the customer. The cost of hardware and additional services is low. We have three-year support that's built-in with NETGEAR, which is great. That might be standard in the industry, but as far as their help goes, they've been wonderful. Right now, on the little switches, we're only using the switch. We're not really utilizing Insight because of the cost.

WHICH OTHER SOLUTIONS DID I EVALUATE?

I looked at a lot of the competitors out there including NETGEAR vs Cisco Ethernet Switches and Barracuda; you name it. I looked at all the different switches. NETGEAR was the one that caught my eye, especially with that modular switch. I looked into Ubiquiti, but we already had Ubiquiti access points on the property. Personally, I didn't like the way that the controllers and the software were set up. I definitely like the NETGEAR stuff better. The price point, compared to a lot of the competitors that didn't have the modular switch, was about 20 to 30 percent less expensive. The functionality and the tech support were big things too, in my decision to go with NETGEAR.

WHAT OTHER ADVICE DO I HAVE?

If you're building out a network, utilize the skillsets of a consulting company that knows what they're doing, that understands what your problems are so that they find the right solution and the right products. Don't go to ABC Company and get a cookie-cutter package that's not really going to solve the problem that you have. Each does something different so having the right product on the network and knowing what the functionality of that product is, that's the big key to the puzzle. Regarding the high-bandwidth AV over IP functionality, the property that we're managing has 270 units and they're all streaming on the network, either 4K or HD movies. They have Netflix and a lot of them use Amazon software or Amazon Fire, or they use a Roku or different streaming platforms through their TVs and on their network. High-bandwidth AV over IP allows the switch to just do its job, and the switch

works really well. We're not doing any routing through the switch, although it also has that capability which is great. Right now we have a firewall that's on the network that is controlling the routing but the switch does a phenomenal job, especially with the AV side of things. It has never held us back and the speed through it is pretty phenomenal. Most of it is through fiber optics so we're getting almost the full speed, which right now is at 250 by 250, at everyone's complex. Most of them are getting about 200, and we just upgraded the network to one gig, up and down, so we can't wait to see what the switch is able to do. This solution is serving about 300 users. It doesn't take much for maintenance. As long as you do the firmware updates, and normally there aren't too many, it's good. We've put in place a lot of little things so backing it up is easy, it's automatic. The configuration file is easy. There's not much to do to maintain it because it does it automatically. It automatically backs up and it automatically updates the firmware. As long as the configuration file is saved, if there's ever an issue, uploading it is very easy too. We don't have plans to increase usage at this time. We're using about 85 percent of the switch when it comes to the functionalities of what the switch does. We're at the point where we don't need to utilize it more because I designed the network to future-proof it ahead of time. Once I installed it I didn't have to change it anymore, because I knew that we were going to be getting the one-gig circuit. All of the equipment that's there is already built for a one-gig circuit. Once we get the new internet I just change the IP addresses and that's it. I won't have to touch it again. It's helped us tremendously, in terms of the equipment, knowing that we can rely on the NETGEAR product. It will allow our customer to save a ton of money, in the long term, because we were able to remove all of the extra equipment. We were able to put in one piece of equipment, versus utilizing four different switches to run the network, switches which were bottlenecking the full network itself. It's helped us tremendously to be able to show them that we're a reliable company and that we offer great products. It does the job that we said it was going to do, and that's why I would continue using the NETGEAR product. I would rate the M4300 a ten out of ten. Even with the issues I mentioned, it has saved me time and money, and it has saved our company money over any other switch. This switch, with the modular input of the fiber optic and the ethernet in the same switch, has saved us having to purchase extra equipment and troubleshooting that extra equipment. It's one piece of equipment, one point of access for us to go in and troubleshoot if we need to.

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