LIVING SYSTEMS: TECHNOLOGY ENABLEMENT OF SECURE REMOTE WORKFORCES

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture [00:00:03] Hi, everyone, it's Penelope Prett, Accenture's Chief Information Officer, and I am here today with Tony Leraris, who leads Accenture's live technology services and support globally. And Tony's team is responsible for the enablement of Accenture from end to end. Today, specifically, I've asked Tony to share a little bit about how he securely enabled five hundred thousand employees to work remotely at speed during the Covid crisis. Hi, Tony. Thanks for joining us today.

Tony Leraris - Technology Director, Accenture [00:00:32] Hi, Penelope. Thanks for having me.

Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture [00:00:35] o, Tony, can you give us a little bit of an overview of what you had to accomplish with our workforce as part of Covid enablement?

Tony Leraris - Technology Director, Accenture [00:00:46] Sure, I'd be happy to. You know, we had at Accenture some very detailed business resiliency plans, but none of our plans accounted for the entire world having to work from home at one time. And in parts of our business with our consultants, those people were very used to being able to work on the road, work from the hotel, work from their home, work from the airplanes, work from the clients, and so they were well-prepared for that. I can get into more details about why that was but in our delivery centers and some of our locations around the world, we had people that primarily worked from our office

They primarily used desktop computers and they don't always have internet connections at home. And so we ended up having to ship home, with the employees, over 80,000 desktop computers, monitors, keyboards, mice, as well as 33,000 wireless hotspots in order to enable people to work. And we did that in the span of about seven days as things were rapidly closing down. So, Penelope, for us, it was a monumental task to keep our workforce going and productive.

Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture [00:02:02] I remember some of the conversations around it, Tony, and the logistics of the whole thing were just staggering, right? So as you talked through the plan with me, can you go back and highlight some of the things that were key to enabling that entire workforce to be working at home and then to support them on an ongoing basis?

Tony Leraris - Technology Director, Accenture [00:02:25] Yeah. You know, for us, certainly the first thing you have to start with is security because we have an obligation to protect Accenture's data and, more importantly, to protect our clients' data. And so when you think about the process for sending people home, we had to really think through and be confident that we could secure all of our end points. And again, because we had been doing that for a large part of our workforce already, it was really about applying what we learned in securing those machines to that percentage of people, to the large number of people that we were going to be sending home.

Then, in addition, the second thing that we really had to think about was how do you scale, right? With all of the traffic coming through our applications from the Internet - so the corporate network - how do you scale in such a way that you support that? And there we certainly benefited from all of the investments we made in cloud technologies and platforms as a service we purchased over the years. And we were very well positioned, I think, to immediately pivot the workforce and scale the work from home capacity. So Penelope, for us, I think it wasn't just about what we did in the moment, which was incredibly important, but, you know, the entire vision that we had was moving us to a place where we could rapidly pivot and support this change.

Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture [00:03:57] And, Tony, the conversations that I've had with several clients over the last couple of months...We refer to that as the last mile - actually taking a device that was in a secured location, moving to an unsecured location. Can you get a little more specific about the additional security that you put around the device as you move it into a different physical location?

Tony Leraris - Technology Director, Accenture [00:04:19] Yeah, sure. So we have hard disk encryption so, on the physical level, if a machine was compromised, the disk is encrypted and can't be removed and used. We, of course, had anti-virus software. But we also - many companies do this - have web filtering. So when you're in an office, you can't get to certain malicious URLs. We have cloud-based web filtering so all of our machines, all of the URLs or places you go on the Internet, we have protection no matter where you are located. So the combination of those things plus we have controls around software that you can install on your computer. And we have data loss prevention software that protects us in the event that certain data were trying to leave the PC. So between physically securing the hard drive, we were able to control what websites you might go to. We had controls in place for antivirus, for malicious software that could be installed on your machine and data loss prevention. And when you think about those things across the board, those really secure the end point to a point where you can feel confident with people working outside the boundaries of your four walls.

Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture [00:05:36] And, as you and I have discussed, it starts with a zero trust viewpoint, right? And the application of controls and technologies that allow you also to adapt dynamically, because the only thing we know right now is that we don't know everything. And being able to respond in field as the situation changes, Tony, is really important. When you think about all of that activity to get us where we are now, what would you consider the key challenges as part of that time?

Tony Leraris - Technology Director, Accenture [00:06:06] I think one of the key challenges...We could easily lock these things down and then people can't be productive. So one of the key challenges is how do you create a secure environment based upon the zero trust that you talked about but still have an environment where people have the tools and the technology that are required and enabled to work. And I think that shifts us to sort of the second area that we're talking about. What are the tools that you give people once you enable them to work from home and you give them those capabilities? And once you've made sure that they can do it securely, then how do you make sure that they can still be as productive as they need to be in the office? And so we, as Covid has evolved, and we feel like we've cracked the nut on the first things, of course, we watch those very carefully…now, for us, it's about, as this continues to go on, how do we enable people to continue to work productively when they can't be in the office and when they can't collaborate in person?

Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture [00:07:14] And so when you think about our enablement toolset Teams is, of course, at the heart of it. Can you talk a little bit about our Teams usage and our Teams journey relative to other companies and what you see next on the horizon as we continue to evolve that productivity curve?

Tony Leraris - Technology Director, Accenture [00:07:32] Sure. So, you know, like many organizations that use Microsoft technologies, we were making the move from Skype for Business to Teams and we had completed that move in the summer of 2019.

So we were 100 percent enabled on Teams when Covid hit us in March, thank God! We saw a huge increase in utilization. So 4x increase in Teams audio conferencing and we're now over a billion minutes a month of Teams audio that we see within Accenture. We saw a huge spike - a 15 times spike - in the amount of video being used. And so we clearly see people are taking advantage of this capability to collaborate. But, you know, just enabling your people with audio conferencing or video conferencing doesn't mean that they're going to be more productive and it especially doesn't mean over time that they'll be able to collaborate effectively. So for us, we think what's so important about Teams is all the other things that come along with the collaboration technologies - Teams and how it's all integrated into one product. So the ability to use a Team, the ability to integrate whiteboard capabilities, planner capability, a way for a team to really function the way they would if they were sitting in a conference room is super important for organizations and it's going to be for the next six to nine months as we continue to deal with Covid situations. So we think we are extremely well positioned with the tools that we've given our people, that we will continue to be able to be more productive and we will find innovative ways to work together and allow our people to serve our clients in a way that can be differentiated from some of our peers.

Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture [00:09:26] And one of those differentiations I just want to put a little plug in for here that you and Jason Warnke were part of the team that developed. It was the Microsoft Teams Rapid Resource Center, which contains a host of reference materials, policies, best practices and teaching tools about how to get the most out of your collaboration toolset. Tony, it's been amazing working with you and the team. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Tony Leraris - Technology Director, Accenture [00:09:53] Now, it's been a heck of a run. It's one that I hope we don't go through again but, you know, it's this tremendous opportunity, I think, to do some things and really, really enable people at Accenture. And so we're pretty proud of what we accomplished.

Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture [00:10:11] And well you should be. Thanks Tony. Appreciate the time.

Tony Leraris - Technology Director, Accenture [00:10:16] Thank you.

Narrator [00:10:17] Thank you for joining today's podcast. Be sure to subscribe to the Accenture CIO podcast series on Apple podcasts or Spotify. Find the full CIO 24/7 podcast series and additional ways to subscribe ADIC Central Dot com slash CIO podcast.