

Farmers Mutual Group

FMG Advice & Insurance

Industry: Insurance for the rural sector

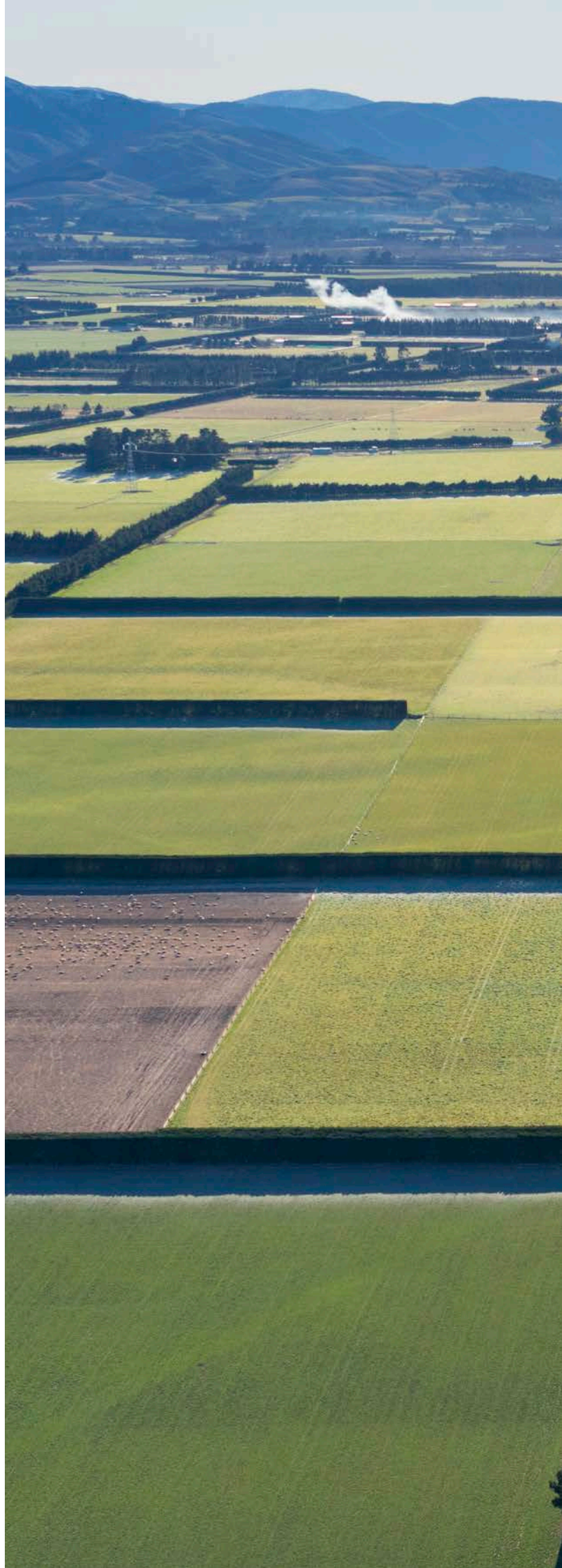
Solutions: Network as a Service, including routers, Mobile, switches, wifi, connections, internet, Firewall, Data Centre.

Challenge

- Complex existing network
 - Dated network architecture
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The Outcome

Significantly increased network capacity, improved stability and performance, delivered over a fully-managed service.



Fast-growing FMG turns to 2degrees managed service

FMG is a New Zealand owned and operated rural insurance business. It is a mutual, which means its members are the owners. Its staff provide advice and insurance to over 100,000 people. There are 32 offices nationwide. Demand is strong and the organisation continues to add more people each month.

Problem

Like most fast-growing organisations, FMG has ever more complex technology needs. Christian Hayes, who heads FMG's technology and service delivery team, says it needed both day-to-day help and external thought leadership to move things forward. The organisation wanted to update to Microsoft Windows 10 and Office365. It also wanted to conduct company-wide video conferencing. It sees an increased role for cloud in its future. To get there, FMG needed a modern network architecture. Its network shopping list included faster connections, better security and improved reliability at each site.



“We wanted to move closer to a network-as-a-service model. That’s where our partner would provide and run the whole end-to-end process, right down to the access layer switches”

*Christian Hayes
Head of technology and service
delivery, FMG*

Solution

Rural insurer FMG recognised it wanted more than a traditional technology provider relationship. To get there, it developed a partnership strategy. Hayes says that meant looking for one or more specialists able get a better understanding of the business, play a strategic role and offer forward-looking guidance. It found the answer in the form of a managed service partnership.

In the past FMG used its own people to handle the technology work. Hayes says the previous technology provider did a fine job, but it took a transactional approach to the relationship. He says: “Say we purchased Wi-Fi technology from a particular provider. We’d set it up ourselves and run it. We would contact the provider and ask for a network link for a specific purpose.

“As the organisation has grown, so has the complexity of the services that we need to provide. This is particularly true from an IT perspective. That becomes more and more challenging as time goes on.”

One aim of the partnership strategy was to free up the internal technology team. FMG wanted them to move from commodity areas like networking and desktop computing, focusing instead on value added services for the organisation.

Hayes says the incumbent provider didn’t have a modern network architecture. FMG needed this to support an internet first approach. “We wanted to move closer to a network- as-a-service model. That’s where our partner would provide and run the whole end-to-end process, right down to the access layer switches”, he says.

Under the old agreement a single internet connection served FMG’s 32 offices. It linked to net from the service provider’s Wellington base. Users accessed the connection using across the organisation’s legacy WAN. There was a problem with latency, but the main issue was capacity constraint. There was a single 500 mbps pipe for the entire organisation. Hayes says: “We had a modern Wi-Fi system, but it didn’t perform. People couldn’t roam around the office or move from point to point. We didn’t have a robust service level.”

2degrees is providing FMG with a managed service that covers network-as-a-service and mobile as a service. There’s a low-latency layer 2 software defined wide area network. The whole is supported with granular reporting and network control. Each of the organisation’s 32 sites has local internet breakout. A managed firewall provides security. The design goal was to deliver these services without impacting business operation.

Hayes says with 2degrees, each of the organisation’s sites has as much capacity as the single internet pipe in the previous network. Where necessary, there are redundant links. He says: “I estimated that we now have about 20 times the bandwidth. Network performance is one benefit. Another is reliability. Since we’ve moved the network has been very stable.”



“This has completely transformed what we are able to do. 2degrees also provides mobile data connections for our mobile phone fleet.”

One illustration of how 2degrees SD-WAN has changed life for FMG is that, as part of its move to Windows 10 and Office365, the organisation rolled out 800 laptops. Hayes says: “We went for the modern approach. Rather than build an image and copying or factory installing it, we sent the laptops out in a thin format. Then when a person logged on for the first time, they would download all the updates and applications that they needed at the local site. This takes a lot of bandwidth, yet we managed to do it without impacting all the other services. It could have taken weeks to do the old way, instead with 2degrees SD-WAN, took a couple of hours.”

FMG’s longer term plans include getting more from cloud computing. Hayes says the organisation has a significant data centre in Palmerston North. He says: “The 2degrees network is the first step in our plan to move that data centre into Microsoft Azure. We’ll start the transition process next year, but it wasn’t practical, or even possible, to do anything without the network.”



Vocus (New Zealand) Ltd is part of the 2degrees group of companies and is trading as 2degrees.

