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A network with greater agility, visibility and scale

team.blue migrates to a fully supported, enterprise class, production-hardened network solution with Enterprise SONiC distribution by Dell Technologies.

Customer profile

team.blue

Digital services | Europe

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"We believe SONiC is
the future of networking."

Michael Munk Lassen
Head of Technology, Infrastructure
for the Nordics, team.blue

Business needs

team.blue, a rapidly growing managed service provider, needed to migrate to a more flexible and reliable open-source network solution.

Business results

- An automated, intent-based and secure containerized network
- Scalable solution to support business growth
- Lower total cost of ownership
- Increased visibility and awareness with network telemetry

Solutions at a glance

- Enterprise SONiC Distribution by Dell Technologies

- Dell EMC PowerSwitch Z9264F-ON and S5200-ON Series Switches

- Red Hat® Ansible®-based network automation

team.blue is a rapidly growing managed service provider with operations in more than 10 countries across the European continent and plans to expand worldwide. Currently, with 1,500 employees, the company hosts more than two million customers — mostly small- and medium-sized businesses and entrepreneurs.

team.blue is the product of several key mergers in 2019, namely the Combell Group, TransIP Group and Register Group. Over the last few years, they've been focused on building platforms that serve as the basis for powerful digital services. The company exceeds customer needs with diversified product offerings, the highest level of expertise and best-in-class local support.

The desire for a different kind of network

Like many organizations today, team.blue's existing network was built on proprietary technology. And while its network fabric was relatively stable, it didn't offer much in the way of flexibility or control. team.blue knew it wanted something new moving forward — essentially, a different kind of network that offered full control of the technology stack at optimal cost and with no vendor lock-in.

To avoid the pitfalls of a proprietary solution, team.blue started looking at open-source and third-party vendor options. They began working with Dell Technologies because of its proven reputation and leadership in open networking. As their interest in open-source solutions increased, they began to focus their efforts on SONiC (software for open networking in the cloud). "We believe SONiC is the future of networking," says Michael Munk Lassen, Head of Technology, Infrastructure for team.blue in the Nordics. "Given its Microsoft® origins, SONiC is continually being maintained and updated, and it's used in Microsoft Azure® and other big cloud providers."

When Dell Technologies announced the launch of a commercial distribution of SONiC — and enterprise support for that solution — team.blue knew it wanted in. According to Lassen, "We pretty much said, 'We want this. Let's go!'"
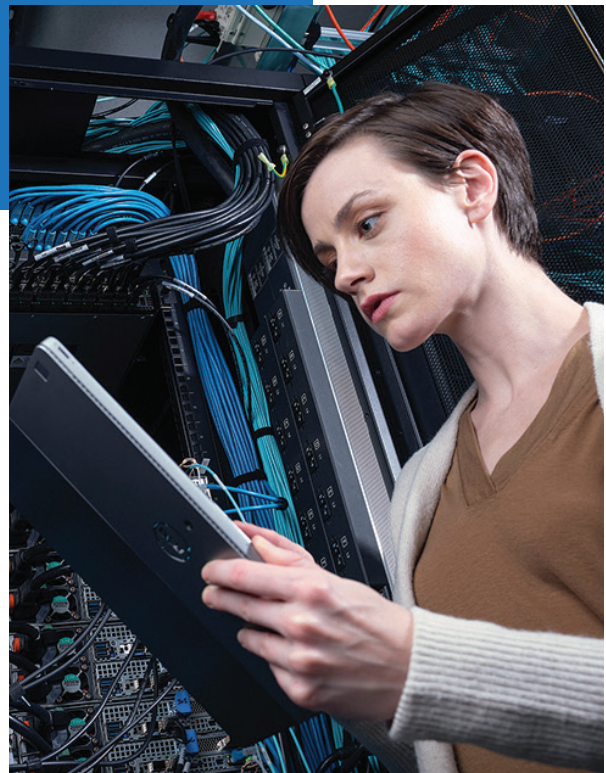
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The promise of open technology

Prior to that announcement, team.blue was feeling constrained by the limitations of its existing network fabric. "The product we were using had a difficult learning curve. It was less agile, and it didn't scale like we needed it to," says Lassen.

Lack of visibility was also a concern. "It was like a black box," Lassen adds. "Traffic would go in one place and come out another place, and we didn't know what was happening in between at all. We were essentially blind."

The company decided to take a step back and figure out what it really needed from a networking perspective. They determined that team.blue needed a reliable platform that provided greater flexibility and control. They knew they wanted open source, better telemetry capabilities and an enterprise feature set. Support from a trusted partner that could help them through the migration was an added bonus.

Dell Technologies also delivers distinct value, not only in its enterprise support of the distribution, but also in the functionality it brings to the solution. "When we started on the SONiC journey, the open-source implementation of SONiC did not support things like multi-chassis link aggregation (MLAG)," says Lassen. "But Dell Technologies brings certain enterprise software functionality and support to the table that enables us to run SONiC confidently."

With Enterprise SONiC Distribution by Dell Technologies, Lassen and his team get a predictable hardware and software solution that prioritizes their specific enterprise requirements.

More control, scale and support

An open networking fabric is designed to provide greater control. For team.blue, that means moving forward on their terms. Open-source technology offers a new level of freedom and, in that sense, investment protection.

They consider SONiC "very interesting." The technology is already proven in the field, and the company is happy to tap into the scale and functionality it's capable of. "Its ability to do API-based orchestration, telemetry and all that stuff is very important to us," says Lassen. "We recognize this isn't unique to SONiC because many vendors can do it." But, he adds, "Some just choose to make it harder than others."

On that note, Dell Technologies wants to make things as easy as possible — through open technology, enhanced capability built into their SONiC distribution, and enterprise-level support.

Dell Technologies enables team.blue to get everything they want out of SONiC. For example, Lassen is impressed with the complete level of control he now has. "What's different about SONiC is that it is API-based from the ground up, so there's pretty much nothing that we cannot do with it."

Similarly, scale is a priority for team.blue, and Dell Technologies makes it easier to tap into SONiC's scalability. "The hardware from Dell Technologies is able to pull up that scale," says Lassen, "which is pretty impressive." Dell Technologies has been able to deliver where others can't.

team.blue is already seeing other benefits in terms of ease of fabric setup, automated provisioning and flexibility in building customized monitoring from telemetry exports.

The fact that SONiC is a new and exciting technology also works in team.blue's favor. "Working with very new, very modern technology also makes us more attractive to potential candidates, which is very important given the competitive market we operate in," Lassen adds.

The right partner

Implementation and migration were relatively fast and easy with help from the Dell Technologies account and support teams. SONiC is open source and can be complicated, admits Lassen. "Having Dell Technologies there to help and speed things along was great." Implementation took the company roughly a month, and the initial migration was just a week. The company also went straight into production. "The fact that SONiC is already proven at scale, combined with the commitment from the Dell Technologies team made us confident that it was production ready," says Lassen.

team.blue admits that they would prefer *not* to stand alone. "Even though we're a semi-large hosting company, we're still nowhere near the point where we would want to develop or support this technology ourselves," says Lassen. "We'd rather focus on automating the day-to-day stuff than invest in building the technology stack; and, if something goes wrong, we like having someone that's an expert in the technology that we can call."

Choosing to work with Dell Technologies has made all the difference. "We're incredibly impressed with the level of commitment and engagement by the account team, product management, engineering and support staff at Dell Technologies," says Lassen. That is what sold team.blue on Dell Technologies, and it's what keeps them satisfied.

Confidence to move forward

Currently team.blue is running a two-tier leaf-and-spine architecture using Dell EMC PowerSwitch Z-series at the spine layer and Dell EMC PowerSwitch S-series with MCLAG and VXLAN EVPN at the leaf layer, or top of rack.

They started off with a 10-rack installation as a way to validate the solution. "This enabled us to migrate away from our previous solution to Dell Enterprise SONiC," says Lassen. "But it also enabled us to put significant workloads on it from day one."

The company is planning to scale and add 20 racks and another 40 racks later. The entire migration will be based on Enterprise SONiC Distribution by Dell Technologies. "SONiC will be replacing all Spine-Leaf PODs in all our 5 data centers within the next few years and the total amount of racks will be north of 100," Lassen adds.

"Not only has Dell Technologies provided us an insane amount of confidence in the product, but they've supported and enabled us so that we can move forward faster and easier than we normally could without their help."

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