Atlantic Broadband Fiber Helps DelGrosso Foods Improve Reliability and Boost Revenue

Atlantic Broadband's fiber-based Ethernet service enables the food services provider to cut costs and prevent and solve a host of operating problems.

By Sean Buckley / *Broadband Communities*

DelGrosso Foods, a provider of spaghetti sauces and the owner of an amusement park in Tipton, Pennsylvania, has leveraged Atlantic Broadband's fiber-based Ethernet service to improve its businesses.

Before Atlantic Broadband built fiber out to its facilities, DelGrosso experienced outages that heavily influenced its credit-card point of sale (POS) system, resulting in lost business. Since making the switch to fiber, DelGrosso has seen various benefits.

DelGrosso eliminated problems with credit-card processing and internet and website availability and ended its reliance on its backup satellite service. It was also able to cut costs and increase revenue by integrating its storage to in-house data centers, which bolstered online sales.

A family-owned company, DelGrosso is keen on developing long-term relationships with its communications suppliers. The company's relationship with Atlantic Broadband and its predecessor, Charter, dates back to the 1990s.

Todd Walters, senior director of information technology at DelGrosso, has guided the food services company through a long list of technology transitions, including ISDN-based dial-up internet and, later, cable modems. "This started a long-term partnership with Atlantic Broadband, and we have had excellent service," he says.

Consistency has been another element of DelGrosso's relationship with Atlantic Broadband. "I have had the same technician and salesperson for pretty much everything at Atlantic Broadband for my entire time that DelGrosso has worked with the company, including cable modems through the fiber-based offerings we now use," Walters says.
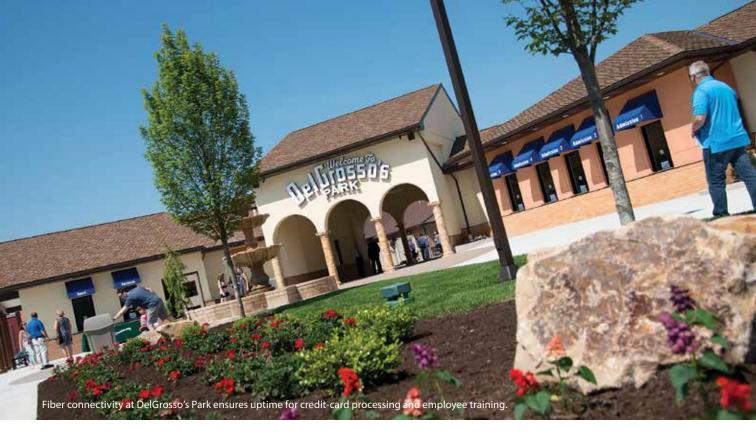
TRANSITION TO FIBER-BASED ETHERNET

A multisite business, DelGrosso requires a network provider to satisfy its diverse needs.

DelGrosso has a sauce production facility in Tipton, Pennsylvania, that is connected to another production facility 5 miles away. The company plans to build a third facility, which will function first as a warehouse and later include another production line.

"We wish we had this new facility because the food manufacturing business is booming," Walters says. "With the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been getting orders six months in advance."

DelGrosso's Park, a seasonal amusement park, includes DG to Go, which Walters says is "doing well right now." Customers can pick up pre-ordered, packaged meals from a drive-through area. The company also operates a fresh foods meals division called Marianna's Fundraisers.

Fiber connectivity at DelGrosso's Park ensures uptime for credit-card processing and employee training.

By using fiber-based Ethernet, which it lit in 2016, DelGrosso can split its bandwidth so it can offload data backups in real time to the cloud.

DelGrosso initially used a lower-speed Ethernet connection, but Walters says as the company's business has grown, it has ramped up speed. DelGrosso connected its warehouse in Altoona, Pennsylvania, which now relates to a point-to-point VPN.

The company's new warehouse, which is about 3 miles from its main location, will use Metro Ethernet. To bring Metro Ethernet to the new location, Atlantic Broadband will extend its fiber network.

What differentiates Atlantic

EYEING SIP TRUNKING

Ethernet data services are only one part of DelGrosso's fiber migration strategy.

The company is looking at how it could migrate from TDM-based Primary Rate Interfaces (PRI) to Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) trunking for its voice service systems.

A PRI is a digital telecommunications connection that allows for 23 concurrent transmissions of voice, data or video traffic between a network and a user.

SIP trunking is a set of technical standards that support VoIP calls by initiating and ending calls between a VoIP line and a PSTN. This technology requires internet bandwidth, ideally business fiber internet, to support service quality.

What has driven this discussion for DelGrosso's senior director of information technology, Todd Walters, is that he suffered an outage on the PRI. "In our phone system realm, our PRI went down because of a weather incident for a full day," Walters says. "I had backup SIP trunks that I had not utilized a lot, but it was nice to be able to switch over to SIP, and we had continuity of business."

Walters adds that when DelGrosso's PRI contract comes up next year, "we're going to investigate switching over to SIP. Our DG to Go service runs over a SIP line, and it works very well."

DelGrosso is not alone. A new Eastern Management Group report, "Carrier Grade SIP Trunking," revealed that global businesses with expansive customer and prospect bases, widespread offices, and work-from-home employees can reap rewards using carrier-grade SIP trunking.

Once a nascent service, public IP-based services are a sound foundation for SIP trunking to carry voice and video traffic. John Malone, CEO of Eastern Management Group, said in a previous report that "Public IP services are better suited for carrying latency-sensitive traffic such as voice and video."

DelGrosso Foods connects production facilities with fiber-based Ethernet.

Broadband from other providers that DelGrosso works with is customer service. "I have worked with a number of companies over the years, but we have always received excellent service from Atlantic Broadband," Walters says.

Walters says Atlantic Broadband often will address any issues within a day of being notified, which is helpful to DelGrosso's two-person IT team. "The support and service are there, which is really important, especially with a small staff for the number of businesses we support," Walters says.

ENSURING NETWORK RELIABILITY

In addition to providing improved speed and responsive customer service, Atlantic Broadband has helped DelGrosso boost its network backup capabilities.

Before it had fiber-based Ethernet services installed, DelGrosso relied on backup satellite services from Hughes Networks for the cable modem services it used at its amusement park.

This was because it had limited options for backup. Typically, DelGrosso's Park ran about 50 credit card stations at a time. When it used only the cable modem service for its POS and credit-card systems, the network sometimes failed. "With the cable service, we would have occasional outages or issues," Walters says. "While the outages were not frequent, it was enough that when 50 units went down, it presented a problem."

But reliability has not been an issue for DelGrosso since it migrated to a fiber-based network. "Since we implemented fiber in 2016, we have had no production downtime that impacted our business," Walters says. "We were notified of an overnight outage one time, but it wasn't anything that impacted the amusement park business."

If there is an outage, DelGrosso can shift its business users onto the guest wireless network, which runs on the existing cable plant. This capability is on a separate network.

"It's not an automated failover, but after four years of no service issues, we made the determination that we can manually fail over to the cable network with our firewall if we have to," Walters says. "We paid for this service for X number of years, and we never used it."

With the fiber network in place, DelGrosso's Park can sell day passes and season passes online. Walters says it "now conducts online training for our seasonal workers, which saves us about 40 percent annually."

CLOUD-BASED BACKUPS

The fiber network allows DelGrosso to conduct network backups. Previously, DelGrosso had to transport data off-site, but the fiber allows it to offload traffic onto the cloud.

"As soon as the backups are done internally, we offload everything to Amazon S3 through the segregated fiber," Walters says.

DelGrosso's ability to put data in the cloud gives the company a ready-made disaster recovery tool. If its network is compromised by an environmental disaster that causes a fiber cut or other issue, the data will be available.

"It is nice to have everything off-site in the event of a true disaster because it will allow us to spin up services and work remotely," Walters says. "Also, having the ability to move our backup nightly through the fiber service is useful because more backups are always good."

SUPPORTING REMOTE WORK

Like other businesses, DelGrosso has needed to enable more employees to work remotely because of the COVID-19 crisis.

In short order, DelGrosso went from having two to three people working remotely to 30. The company was able to quickly enable remote workers. "We were able to get all of our remote users connected with SSL VPNs," Walters says. "We had continuity of business while getting people who could work

> The fiber network allows DelGrosso to store backups in the cloud.

from home out of the facility."

The success of transitioning to remote work temporarily has inspired DelGrosso to consider how to make remote work a permanent feature of its business. "This is potentially setting things up so that we may be able to have more offerings in that area," Walters says. "All the remote users have been operating successfully with no issues." ❖

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CABLE OPERATORS ENHANCE ETHERNET, FIBER-LIT BUSINESSES' BUILDING REACH

Cable operators continue to evolve in the business market – they've gone from providing basic cable modem services and voice to small businesses to being growing players in the fiber-based Ethernet market.

According to research firm Vertical Systems Group, the cable MSO segment is the second-largest of the three U.S. Ethernet provider segments, accounting for more than one-quarter of total U.S. port installations by the end of 2019.

Atlantic Broadband is an example of that trend. The cable MSO expanded its southern Florida network reach by purchasing metro assets from FiberLight in September 2018.

It added 350 route miles to its existing southern Florida footprint, more than doubling its existing fiber footprint in the region while expanding its capacity to serve data center customers by 30 percent.

Likewise, Atlantic Broadband's acquisition of MetroCast's Connecticut network gave Atlantic Broadband an additional 70,000 homes and businesses across nine communities in eastern Connecticut.

Atlantic Broadband now has more than 7,000 route miles, including more than 25,000 on-net and 7,500 near-net service buildings.

These efforts propelled Atlantic Broadband into 11th place in Vertical Systems Group's (VSG) 2019 U.S. Fiber Lit Buildings Leaderboard for the first time. To qualify for a listing, a fiber provider must have 10,000 or more on-net U.S. fiber-lit commercial buildings.
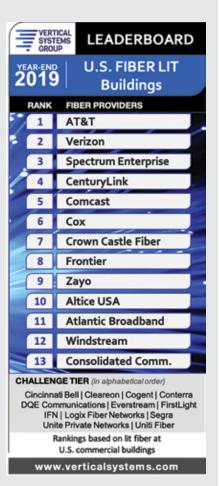
The research firm defines a fiber-lit building as a commercial site or data center that has on-net optical fiber connectivity to a network provider's infrastructure, plus active service termination equipment on-site. Near-net means that a service provider may have fiber passing by or nearby a building that has multiple businesses.

"The number of on-net fiber lit commercial buildings exceeded 1 million in 2019 as network providers concentrated on U.S. footprint expansion. New fiber deployments are providing dedicated access to network services, connecting 5G small cells, enabling low latency for edge computing, and supporting the massive bandwidth surge for webscale companies," said Rosemary Cochran, a principal of VSG, in a release.

Cochran cautioned, however, "that while essential fiber deployments will proceed, some planned installations will be adjusted due to unanticipated capacity demands caused by the coronavirus crisis."

Overall, VSG revealed fiber availability into commercial buildings increased to 64.5 percent for medium and large buildings.

VSG tracks two primary segments for the U.S. fiber-lit landscape based on building size: Fiber 20+ (Medium/Large) and Fiber <20 (Small). The Fiber 20+ segment, which includes buildings with 20 or more employees, has a 64.5 percent fiber-lit availability rate. This compares to 12.1 percent availability for the Fiber <20 segment, which includes buildings with fewer than 20 employees. Despite this availability gap, small buildings propelled growth in 2019 with the Fiber <20 segment, accounting for more than two-thirds of new fiber-lit sites.

VERTICAL SYSTEMS GROUP — LEADERBOARD

YEAR-END 2019 — U.S. FIBER LIT Buildings

RANK	FIBER PROVIDERS
1	AT&T
2	Verizon
3	Spectrum Enterprise
4	CenturyLink
5	Comcast
6	Cox
7	Crown Castle Fiber
8	Frontier
9	Zayo
10	Altice USA
11	Atlantic Broadband
12	Windstream
13	Consolidated Comm.

CHALLENGE TIER *(in alphabetical order)*

Cincinnati Bell | Cleareon | Cogent | Conterra DQE Communications | Everstream | FirstLight IFN | Logix Fiber Networks | Segra Unite Private Networks | Uniti Fiber

Rankings based on lit fiber at U.S. commercial buildings

www.verticalsystems.com

Atlantic Broadband advances its on-net fiber reach.