



Savvis Offers the Right Colocation and Managed Security Services for drugstore.com

Overview

drugstore.com, inc. is a leading online retailer of health, beauty, vision, and pharmacy products. Founded in 1998, the Seattle-based retailer offers more than 50,000 non-prescription products — both name-brand and hard-to-find items — via always-open Web stores. The company reported sales of \$413 million in fiscal 2009, which represented an increase of 12.9 percent over 2008 at a time when most retailers were experiencing declining revenues due to the economic recession. It also added 1.8 million new customers during those 12 months, and earned a customer satisfaction rating of 79 from ForeSee, which measures customer satisfaction among top Internet retailers. This puts drugstore.com's customer satisfaction ratings equal to or better than such respected brands as Nordstrom, Costco, and Macy's.

Business Opportunity

When Don Allen, drugstore.com's chief technology officer (CTO), joined drugstore.com four years ago, he had accrued significant industry experience as Director of IT for Onyx Software and prior to that managing Costco's e-commerce operations inside of Costco's data center. Those operations had been built and completely managed internally. But drugstore.com had always gone a different route: colocation. At that point, it had been very successfully using Savvis as its colocation vendor for more than six years. Still, Allen was skeptical.

"Over my entire career I had always worked in self-run data centers, and was used to having full control," said Allen. "I could move floor tiles, set up my own cameras, install my own fire suppressors. And I had always seen this as a strength."

But Allen's skepticism soon turned into admiration for drugstore.com's IT strategy. "It's not about what your IT organization can and can't do," he said. "It's about what it should and shouldn't do. drugstore.com rightly understood that it needed to be focusing on the technology that would drive business, not on cooling and fire suppression. Since that's where Savvis has its expertise, it made perfect sense to trust it with our data center."

Company:
drugstore.com, inc.

Industry:
Retail

Line of Business:
Online drugstore

Target Market:
Consumers worldwide

Location:
Seattle

Summary:
drugstore.com needs to focus on growing its business, not on the nuts and bolts of hosting a data center. An extremely satisfied Savvis customer for more than a decade, drugstore.com has more recently added Managed Security services, which prevents Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, isolates suspicious traffic, and allows legitimate traffic through.

Solution

drugstore.com uses Savvis for colocation and Managed Security. It houses its data center at Savvis' Seattle SE2 facility, where it currently has 24 racks of servers containing both Windows and UNIX servers. It also subscribes to Savvis' cloud-based Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) mitigation service, in which the Savvis world-class Managed Security Team monitors the drugstore.com network 24/7 to detect attacks. If and when an attack is identified, Savvis places traffic into "protect mode," which allows legitimate transactions to still be processed while malicious traffic is stopped.

Benefits

drugstore.com has reaped a number of significant benefits by depending on Savvis for colocation services. First and foremost, it has kept the all-important drugstore.com Web site up and running, in addition to their other branded sites; Beauty.com™, VisionDirect.com™, TheNaturalStore.com™, AtHisBest.com™, AllergySuperStore.com™ and many more in the company's web store portfolio.

"We were promised a total SLA (service level agreement) of 99.99 percent availability, and Savvis has exceeded that every year," said Allen. "In the four years that I've been in charge of data center operations, we've never had any downtime related to power or cooling. Even when we had some extreme weather and everything iced over, Savvis kept things going."

drugstore.com has also been able to harness its skilled IT workforce more productively. "Savvis handles so much, we don't need to put in more than 20 hours a week total person-hours into managing our entire data center," said Allen. "My staff gets to focus on more value-added activities."

Finally, said Allen, Savvis' customer service has always delivered the goods. "I've had absolutely no complaints about Savvis customer service — and if you knew me, you'd know that's huge," he said.

Future

Whereas drugstore.com's focus in 2009 was to continue driving growth despite the down economy, its goals in 2010 revolve around leveraging its technology platform, infrastructure, and functional expertise to expand its business even further while keeping costs low.

Currently, drugstore.com is considering outsourcing its storage infrastructure to Savvis. "We need an extra terabyte of space, and rather than buying it ourselves and overbuilding, we are thinking of outsourcing it to Savvis," said Allen, who says that drugstore.com is also considering expanding into Savvis' New Jersey data center. "I'm a big fan of the hybrid approach to data center management — there are still things we want to control in-house, yet it doesn't make sense for us to do everything ourselves. We're still figuring out what balance will work best for us in the long term, but whatever we decide, we know Savvis will work with us to make it a success."

drugstore.com just signed another three-year agreement with Savvis — and expects that the relationship will continue into the foreseeable future. "We've evaluated our options over the years — as every business should — but we've never found a vendor that can match Savvis for reliability, performance, and service," said Allen.

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**- Don Allen
Chief Technology Officer (CTO)
drugstore.com**

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