



AT&T helps ad firm drive value for automotive clients

- **Business needs** - Sophisticated tools to enable staff to work securely and efficiently and provide the outstanding services clients expect.
- **Networking solution** - A range of AT&T Business networking, connectivity, and security services enables Martin Retail Group staff to work easily and safely from any location.
- **Business value** - Enhanced productivity and collaboration. Protection for sensitive data.
- **Industry focus** - Advertising
- **Size** - 350 employees in eight U.S. offices

About Martin Retail Group

Martin Retail Group (MRG) drives business for its customers, which include some of the world's largest automobile manufacturers and dealers. The organization is rooted in Martin Advertising, the largest advertising agency in Alabama, which has deep expertise in regional, group, and co-op advertising. For more than 40 years, the agencies have focused on growing their clients' businesses by rolling out seamless brand and sales messages in national markets.

The situation

Martin Retail Group's success meant providing growing numbers of employees with the tools they needed to deliver outstanding customer care. The onset of COVID created new challenges and called for quick action to equip all employees to work securely from remote locations.

Solution

MRG relies on several AT&T Business security and networking solutions to support its growing customer base. AT&T Switched Ethernet on Demand connects company locations through a private line across the nationwide AT&T network. The agency also uses AT&T Secure Remote Access to deliver fast, secure connections between staff and the applications they need and AT&T Managed Endpoint Security with SentinelOne to protect its computers and other devices against attacks.

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Hunter Martin
President, Martin Retail Group

A positive impact for clients

Martin Retail Group targets consumers with the latest research and intelligence. It studies clients' inventory, offers, and goals to create the best possible calls to action. The company occupies eight office locations, employs 350 people, and bills around \$800 million annually. Almost 200 people work at the company's initial location in Birmingham. Two dozen others work in a Troy, Michigan office, and the rest are in regional offices in Georgia, Connecticut, Illinois, Texas, and California.

MRG was built on the success of Martin Advertising, one of the largest full-service ad agencies in the South. Martin Advertising's Birmingham headquarters is a schoolhouse built in 1901. “We developed what our clients call our ‘schoolhouse culture,’” said MRG President Hunter Martin. “It’s the way we interact with each other and with our clients.”

That commitment has won loyal customers for Martin Advertising and the Martin Retail Group. Both agencies develop quality relationships with clients to help make a positive impact on their business.





Supporting its schoolhouse culture

Integrity, teamwork, and respect are among MRG's core values. While the organization has experienced significant growth over 40 years, the owners continue to live by these values and rely on them to guide decision making. "We do things right and treat our teammates and clients the way we like to be treated," Martin said. "And I don't think there's any way to fake that. You really have to live it. Our schoolhouse culture has been a big part of why our business has grown."

MRG provides marketing services to about 4,000 automotive manufacturers and dealerships. The company's media business has been its largest growth driver. What began with an annual media spend of about \$25 million will be just over a billion dollars this year, Martin said. "It's grown quickly, but our tech advancements and efficiencies enable our teams to do what they do on a much larger scale."

When COVID descended on the world in 2020, MRG had to move quickly to enable employees to work from home. While equipping them with the technology they needed was a big concern, Martin

had other worries. "Our culture was built on being around people and developing relationships, and I was very worried about how that would translate to a 100% virtual environment for an indefinite period. That was probably the biggest hurdle for us," he said. MRG needed to equip its staff to work from home, in a way that would support the cooperation and camaraderie of its schoolhouse culture.

Timing is everything

A longtime AT&T Business client, MRG turned to its AT&T Business account team for assistance. "We quickly put our concerns to bed because we were able to transition to a virtual world without a hiccup as far as output and deliverables," Martin said. The MRG IT team worked with AT&T Business to equip employees with everything they needed to work from home.

"I was pleasantly surprised at how much of a non-issue it was. Everybody went on working and took to the virtual world well," he said. "Our concern was around how we maintained our culture virtually as opposed to being an in-office agency for so long, but we found our footing and really started figuring out new ways to approach culture and work."

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Michael Bobo
IT Director, Martin Retail Group



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Michael Bobo, MRG’s IT Director, said the relationship with AT&T Business facilitated the move from the office to home. “We had been testing new ideas for remote users and our AT&T account rep had just onboarded AT&T Secure Remote Access,” he said.

“Hunter told staff we were going to do a dry run with AT&T Secure Remote Access to see how it would work. That dry run turned into two years at home,” Bobo said. “AT&T definitely caught us at a good moment. We had some things in place that we wanted to try out for the future. We just didn’t know that the future was the very next day.”

MRG had only a few gateway licenses when COVID hit. “We had to quickly rotate and bounce the count up overnight,” he said. Most staff were using desktop

computers, but in another stroke of luck, MRG had just replaced the laptop computers for workers in its field offices. The IT team deployed the repurposed field office laptops for use by the Birmingham office staff. “It became a mad scramble to reload all those machines and have them prepped and ready for our folks in the Birmingham office to take home,” Bobo said.

Secure and accessible information

In addition to using AT&T Secure Remote Access, MRG also relied on AT&T Switched Ethernet on Demand when staff began working from home. The self-service, intelligent networking solution made it simple to scale services and bandwidth easily. “AT&T Secure Remote Access probably helped us the most by quickly getting people on the AT&T Switched Ethernet via a secure pathway,” Bobo said.

Security is top of mind for Bobo and his colleagues. “We want to make sure all our information is secure and still accessible by our employees, but accessible by only our employees,” he said.

Staff needed to access a variety of productivity platforms, financial programs, and proprietary media apps to do their jobs. This required adding remote desktop software and AT&T Secure Remote Access on laptops to connect creative teams to their high-powered graphics machines at the office.

Equipped to serve clients

Within days, staff were working productively from home. “We thought we were going to be out of the office for about two weeks,” Martin said. “We couldn’t have imagined that it would be years.”

MRG's eight-member IT team did a great job of equipping employees to continue to serve its clients. "You know the old saying — if life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. That's kind of what we did. We just did the best with what we had," Bobo said. "And our upper management were very patient as we worked out the challenges, and gave us the time, energy, and money to do what we had to do quickly."

He said he was also thankful that the AT&T Business services worked well for MRG staff. "Our AT&T services were 100% reliable. We had no network or security issues," he said. "Our biggest issue was whether we would have enough equipment to get everyone connected."

"We didn't have to worry about whether the technology was going to work or that the AT&T connectivity would be stable. We were thankful that all of that could stay running all the time and we would not have to worry about failures on top of all the other problems we were having."

Covering all the bases

Bobo said MRG benefits from the attention it receives from its AT&T Business account representative. "In Alabama we like that personal touch that AT&T provides," he said. "Having someone local to interact with us made a huge difference, which reflects our core values. Our relationship with our account rep helped us. AT&T could see our challenges and offer products or solutions."

For example, AT&T Business found a solution to further secure all devices connecting to the MRG network. "I wasn't sure we were covering all our security bases and voiced those concerns to our

account rep," he said. "He suggested AT&T Managed Endpoint Security with SentinelOne to protect our endpoints against attacks."

"Our AT&T rep has a lot of technical knowledge to help us make good decisions, and he has a support staff of tech people who are specialized in different areas."

Michael Bobo
IT Director, Martin Retail Group

AT&T Managed Endpoint Security with SentinelOne delivers security monitoring, management, and protection, enhanced with threat hunting for proactive detection, advanced forensic mapping, and automated response. "We did some demos of it, we loved it, and then we onboarded it. That personal relationship gives (our representative) the ability to hear our pain points, ask questions, and figure out a solution."



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The solution provides actionable feedback to the MRG IT team, Bobo said. “AT&T Managed Endpoint Security with SentinelOne goes beyond viruses and flags us when a user tries to do something that’s a little off, or not in the standard realm,” he said. “This gives us the opportunity to have a conversation with the user and remind them that these are business machines, and they need to get a personal machine for their personal work.”

Solutions from one stop

MRG’s IT team benefits from the expertise of the AT&T Business account representative and the subject matter experts with whom he connects them. “Our AT&T rep has a lot of technical knowledge to help us make good decisions, and he has a support staff of tech people who are specialized in different areas,” Bobo said.

The account rep understands that MRG likes having control over its networks. “He’s very accommodating and helpful to allow us to work through the systems and figure them out and get us exactly what we need.”

“We like the sheer volume of solutions that AT&T has available through one stop,” he said. “It’s important to find a good rep that can spend time with you, hear your challenges, and then offer one of those great solutions.”

MRG President Hunter Martin said he is pleased with the network structure that AT&T Business has helped the company put in place. “Having AT&T as the underpinning for our network and security provides a layer of security and reliability and freedom to do our job without worry,” he said.

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