Healthcare Provider Cuts Costs and Increases Productivity

AnyConnect Helps Four Seasons Health Care grow its mobile workforce by 500 percent without additional support costs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Four Seasons Health Care

Industry: Healthcare

Location: Cheshire, United Kingdom

Number of Employees: 28,000

Challenge
- Improve workforce flexibility
- Boost productivity
- Reduce carbon footprint

Solution
- Cisco AnyConnect Secure Mobility Solution

Results
- Expanded mobile workforce 500 percent without needing additional support
- Helped ensure failsafe secure remote access for all authorized personnel
- Reduced travel and IT-related power consumption by enabling remote working, video conferencing, and thin-client applications delivery

Challenge

Four Seasons Health Care owns and operates more than 500 nursing and care homes and specialized care centers in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey, and the Isle of Man, making it one of the largest independent providers of care services in the United Kingdom.

The company has developed through the acquisition and construction of care facilities and has a reputation for professionalism in all aspects of its care operations. It predominantly cares for older people but also looks after specialist conditions such as dementia, Alzheimer's disease, eating disorders, dependencies, and brain injuries.

To help ensure a consistently high level of care and service across the group, managers (who are usually experienced healthcare professionals with many years' experience) spend about four out of five days visiting and working in the various centers under their care.

Because the company's profitability depends on achieving high levels of occupancy and efficiency, while observing strict compliance with clinical protocols, Four Seasons gave its managers laptop PCs to be able to work during these long periods away from base.

The PCs were equipped with a VPN client to give workers access to all company data and applications, including performance monitoring and office packages. For compliance reasons, these files were housed at the company's data center.

A number of drawbacks arise with this architecture. For example:

- Users' perception of the VPN client was that it slowed down their connections, which meant many were disinclined to use it and would seek alternative, less secure ways of working

- The client was difficult to deploy automatically, creating additional work for the IT department. "We had to visit every laptop," says Network Support Manager Nick Young. "It was not seamless, which is what we were trying to get to."

- The system was not robust enough to support video, which meant it could not be used for video conferencing calls

Finally, when users tried to connect to the Internet from hotels or other off-company locations, they would often have problems with proxy configurations. All the company's Internet connections are provided as proxies through a Cisco IronPort™ web gateway.

> "When people connect from a hotel care facility back to our head office systems, AnyConnect tells them what they need to do. That has made things simpler, but not at the cost of our own protection."

Nick Young
Network Support Manager
Four Seasons Health Care

When users were off the corporate network, this proxy configuration created problems for inexperienced users, even after the IT department supplied an application to switch the proxy setting on and off to allow the initial connection.

Young says it could take as many as six calls, each lasting between five and 30 minutes, before this problem was fully resolved with new laptop users, with a negative impact on the IT department's workload, managers' productivity, and the reputation of the business.

Solution

Young was wary of deploying a replacement remote access system from a leading software-only supplier, as he felt it might be vulnerable to hackers. He also considered a security appliance from a specialist vendor, but this option would have required a significant hardware investment.

His final and preferred option was the Cisco AnyConnect™ Secure Mobility Solution. This combines industry-leading Cisco cloud and premises-based web security and next generation remote access technology to deliver the most robust and secure enterprise mobility solution on the market today. It enables mobile users to easily and securely access the applications and information they need to do their jobs using their mobile device of choice, including laptops and handhelds such as Apple iPhones.

And for Young, a particularly important feature was the fact that Cisco® AnyConnect authorization takes place between the device and existing Cisco ASA 5500 Series Adaptive Security Appliances, which act as firewalls for Four Seasons Health Care's corporate network.

The significance of this is that authentication occurs at the perimeter of the network, unlike other options where devices are first allowed onto the network to connect with an authentication server. "It is attractive, because I do not want anything on my network until I know what it is," Young says. "AnyConnect does the proxy configuration when the client connects. When people connect from a hotel back to our head office systems, AnyConnect tells them what they need to do. That has made things simpler, but not at the cost of our own protection."

Deployment is also simpler. Young says, "Once the initial setup was done and tested it was simply a question of telling people to 'go to this website, log in, and it will load up'. Probably about 10 people had a problem with it, but in every case the problem was actually with something else, like some software not allowing it to load, or a firewall setting."

New users simply log onto Four Seasons Health Care's AnyConnect deployment site and download the software, without having to call upon the IT department. And any changes are updated automatically on users' laptops; Young has not had any technical issues with updates despite completing up to six upgrades.

Results

The value of Cisco AnyConnect was demonstrated dramatically in December 2010, when heavy snow brought roads, railways, and airports to a standstill across much of the United Kingdom.

"People who were not able to travel called us to see if they could work from home," Young says. "We told them to go to the portal, download AnyConnect, then go to the Citrix client, and they would have the same desktop as they had at work. That was all without us having to touch their PC."

Additionally, since AnyConnect has been deployed, the number of devices that it supports has gone up from fewer than 50 to around 300, including Windows-based laptops, Apple Macs, and iPhones. This 500 percent growth in mobile workers has happened with no increase in support calls.

The system is much more reliable than its predecessor, meaning users have no problems in connecting securely and can be more productive and work more easily whenever and wherever they like, even carrying out video conferencing calls over a secure link.

This increased reliability has several benefits for Four Seasons Health Care:

- Patient care is improved through staff's ability to carry out their jobs more effectively and efficiently
- Being able to work more flexibly increases staff productivity and satisfaction
- The ability to work securely from home and other locations is an aid to recruitment
- The reputation of the IT department is enhanced, because it no longer gets complaints about remote network access
- Fewer IT department resources are needed to deal with remote access issues, despite a growing number of mobile workers
- Networking costs are being reduced by using AnyConnect for secure remote access at locations where Four Seasons currently does not provide a private broadband connection

A final benefit is that AnyConnect is helping Four Seasons Health Care reduce its carbon footprint.

And as an example of the carbon, cost, and time saved on travel, says Young: "I live in Dumfries, and my office is in Darlington, 125 miles away. It is a 250-mile round trip, approximately four hours traveling, plus fuel, but with AnyConnect I can do most of my work from home. My costs are probably about a quarter of what they used to be."

He concludes: "I would like to encourage more people to use it, to stop them having to drive around so much."

For More Information

To find out more about the Cisco AnyConnect, please go to: www.cisco.com/go/anyconnect.

Product List

Security

- Cisco ASA 5500 Series Adaptive Security Appliances
- Cisco AnyConnect Secure Mobility Solution
- Cisco IronPort web gateway