

ProMedica Health System Improves Efficiency with a Secure Remote Access Solution from CentraComm

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ProMedica Health System

- Integrated health systems company and a leading name in the healthcare industry
- Based in Toledo, Ohio
- Serves the needs of 2.5 million patients
- 15,000 employees

Challenges

- Provide secure remote access for employees and network users
- Support numerous applications and functionalities on various operating systems and devices

Network Solutions

- Juniper SA4500 SSL VPN Appliance
- CentraComm consulting, implementation, and managed services

Business Results

- Provided secure remote access for all network users
- Built a stable platform that can support hundreds of applications on various operating systems and devices
- Improved performance with the Picture Archival Retrieval System (PACS), a filmless radiology solution
- Improved performance with the Lawson Payroll application

From quality home health care to complex high technology health systems, ProMedica Health System is a leading name in the health care industry and is recognized as one of the nation's most integrated health systems.

Formed in 1986, the Toledo, Ohio based health care system is comprised of over 70 corporations and joint ventures, ten hospitals, and 283 health care sites. From these locations more than 2,900 physicians and over 15,000 employees serve the needs of more than 2.5 million patients.

Through five unique and different divisions of healthcare, ProMedica works collaboratively to provide a wide variety of health services to communities in Ohio and Michigan.

Challenge

"We needed a comprehensive remote access solution that could effectively serve each and every person on the ProMedica network," said Bruce Meyer, Technical Coordinator of Voice and Data at ProMedica Health System. "Supporting hundreds of applications on over a thousand servers is a tall order, but it was a necessity for us."

"We needed a more holistic vendor approach for remote access, and were looking for a vendor that could offer individualized attention with a very high level of expertise."

-Bruce Meyer, Technical Coordinator of Voice and Data, ProMedica Health System

Although ProMedica already had a virtual private network (VPN) solution in place, Meyer and his technical support team were dissatisfied with its technical limitations and the problems users encountered when logging into the ProMediCare online portal. "We had too many interface issues. You had to be on a PC, operating on Windows, and constantly downloading software for anything to work properly," said Meyer. After careful thought and consideration, ProMedica concluded that they needed to implement a new remote access solution that could support a wide variety of applications on virtually any computer or operating system.

Selection Criteria

From electronic health records to radiology solutions, ProMedica needed an easy to navigate online portal that could support hundreds of applications on various computers and operating systems.

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-Bruce Meyer

“We needed a more holistic vendor approach for remote access, and were looking for a vendor that could offer individualized attention with a very high level of expertise,” said Meyer reflecting back upon the decision-making process.

ProMedica was previously aware of CentraComm’s technical expertise and services. When the opportunity arose for ProMedica to find a niche provider known for their remote access capabilities, CentraComm was already in the back of Meyer’s mind. “I sat down with them and told them what I needed. Without hesitation they told me exactly what they could do and the success they’ve had in the past,” said Meyer. “They’d configure the remote access, and for a small fee, manage it, monitor it, and back it up. It was a totally managed solution, but I could still administer it to any degree I wanted.”

Not long after their initial conversation, Bruce invited Patrick Foxhoven, Chief Information Officer at CentraComm, and Mark Robinson, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at CentraComm to conduct an on-site demo. “The demo was pretty amazing,” said Meyer. “We had everything up and running in less than half an hour, and 80% of our applications were already running with a high level of efficiency. We still had to test each one, but things looked great right out of the box!” The demo greatly impressed Meyer and his team of technical decision makers, leading them to ultimately choose CentraComm as the technology partner to implement and manage a new SSL VPN solution.

Solution

CentraComm provided ProMedica with an on-site demo of the Juniper SA6500 SSL VPN (Secure Sockets Layer Virtual Private Network) appliance and the Juniper SA4500 SSL VPN appliance. The SA6500 was a more robust solution than needed, and the SA4500 proved to be a better fit within ProMedica’s technical environment.

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The on-site demo consisted of staging deployment, configuration, testing, and monitoring. Within a few days, ProMedica determined that the Juniper appliance and the CentraComm managed services were the right fit for their network, and opted to utilize a trial SSL VPN package until they were cleared for purchase.

The live deployment process was very similar to the on-site demo with staging and deployment, and further enhanced by implementation and remote management. The Juniper user license was included in the appliance purchase price, thus leaving upgrades and managed services as the only additional expenses needed for system maintenance.

The Results

CentraComm enabled ProMedica Health System to effectively launch the MyPromedica online portal, and successfully provided secure and remote access to several hundred network users.

ProMedica was unique in that it needed a secure remote access solution that supported a wide variety of network users utilizing a diverse spectrum of applications. “There are a lot of great VPN solutions, but remote access for us is a lot more than allowing IT people to jump on a network at anytime from any location,” said Bruce Meyer. “To ProMedica, remote access means that our employees, physician offices, physicians groups, and other offices that are not owned ProMedica practices have secure and instant access to all our applications.” Each has a set of needs, applications, and whatnot.

Prior to implementing the Juniper SSL VPN solution, ProMedica network users had limited access to the applications on the ProMediCare online portal. One such application was PACS (Picture Archival Retrieval System), a filmless radiology solution which makes imaging studies visible online so doctors and radiologists working remotely can make quick and efficient diagnoses. “Before MyProMedica, there was a lot of waiting time and users constantly had to bypass firewalls and install software on their machines,” said Meyer, reflecting upon the poor performance of the previous VPN appliance. With the new Juniper SA4500 in place, the PACS application works seamlessly with all computers and operating systems, and no longer interferes with system firewalls. The faster and more reliable solution not only speeds up and streamlines processes for medical personnel, but for patients as well, as the time spent waiting for results has the potential to dramatically decrease.

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-Bruce Meyer

Another application that was significantly impacted by the move to the Juniper VPN appliance was the Lawson payroll and accounting application. The previous VPN solution and the corresponding ProMediCare portal could not efficiently support this web-based application across all operating systems. Meyer stated that the application was a necessity for ProMedica, but only functioned properly for roughly half of those needing to use it. After witnessing the application’s improved functionality during CentraComm’s on-site demo, Meyer and his technical team were very impressed with both CentraComm and the Juniper SA4500 SSL VPN appliance.

“It worked right out of the box, and nearly everyone was reliant upon the CentraComm demo within days of setting it up,” said Meyer who was thrilled to see the CentraComm solution working so efficiently. “I like any box you can plug in and it works right away. Our last reboot was 229 days ago, which means this appliance is as reliable as a network switch!” ProMedica was also very pleased with the interface of the online portal. Meyer noted that although the initial login screen looks slightly different whether one is connected directly to the network or logged in remotely, all other pages, menus, and applications look exactly the same despite the user’s location and won’t confuse individuals moving from network computers to remote computers.

In regards to the remote support CentraComm provides, Meyer readily praises their professionalism and their expertise. “Rather than talking to level-one tech support staff, I receive individualized attention and support from highly trained staff members who really know what they’re doing,” he said. Likewise, ProMedica is very impressed with the proactive measures CentraComm takes when monitoring the health of their SSL VPN. “The co-managed partnership we have with this appliance is great,” said Meyer. “I can go three weeks without logging in, but have peace of mind knowing that everything is running smoothly.”

“I was reading, trying to learn a little more about Juniper VPN appliances, and low and behold, one of the technical contributors (Patrick Foxhoven, CentraComm CIO) to the book showed up at my office to set up an on-site demo!”

-Bruce Meyer

Reflecting upon ProMedica’s search for a reputable IT company with individualized attention and high level expertise, Meyer is quick to point out that although CentraComm is local and was able to establish the close partnership ProMedica was looking for, their technical capabilities are competitive on an international level. Meyer was shocked to come across a familiar name while researching Juniper VPN appliances, and believes that such evidence is a testament to CentraComm’s professionalism and expertise: “I was reading, trying to learn a little more about Juniper VPN appliances, and low and behold, one of the technical contributors (Patrick Foxhoven, CentraComm CIO) to the book showed up at my office to set up an on-site demo!”




Next Steps and Lessons Learned

ProMedica Health System has seen significant improvements in the performance and reliability of their remote access system after CentraComm’s installation of the SA4500 SSL VPN appliance. ProMedica is confident that they will work closely with CentraComm in the future. “They are in tune with our needs and deliver reliable and top of the line solutions we can trust,” said Meyer.

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