Johns Hopkins adopts security-enhancing remote-access solution

Based in Baltimore, Maryland, the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health is an international authority on public health.

The challenge: integrating remote access with existing networks

IS managers and network administrators work hard to find computing solutions that integrate harmoniously with their existing networks. However, most solutions require complex configuration to work correctly and securely. It is rare to find products that work seamlessly from the beginning, yet this is the reason that Ross McKenzie is so enthusiastic about Citrix® GoToMyPC®. "Our administrative overhead is practically nonexistent with GoToMyPC," said McKenzie, director of Information Systems for Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "The fact that GoToMyPC security standards are the same as ours makes us even happier."

Implementing GoToMyPC for remote desktop access

McKenzie’s Information Systems team is responsible for supporting the school’s important work with leading-edge technology and systems. GoToMyPC provides the school with secure, easy-to-use remote access to the desktop for faculty and staff members working remotely. For McKenzie, keeping his total cost of implementation (TCI) low is important, so it was especially appealing that GoToMyPC is Software as a Service. “Using GoToMyPC means that my network staff has one less piece of equipment to monitor,” he said. “If I can take a burden off them, I’m happy to do it.”

Remote-access security and protecting confidential patient data are key concerns for McKenzie and his team. As a result, two on-staff security professionals rigorously evaluated GoToMyPC before the school purchased it. Their evaluation found that GoToMyPC provides industry-standard security features such as 128-bit AES encryption that mesh precisely with the school’s security policies. “GoToMyPC uses the same security standards we require for everything internally,” said McKenzie. “Multiple levels of authentication, 128-bit data encryption, security time-outs and strong passwords are all important features of GoToMyPC that are required by our security policy,” he said. “The security features are head and shoulders above other standalone remote-access products.”

Helping ensure HIPAA compliance

Security in the healthcare industry is now often synonymous with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance. According to McKenzie, strong security is especially important for the school’s faculty members working with private healthcare information. For this reason, GoToMyPC includes built-in security through 128-bit AES encryption and other security measures that support compliance with HIPAA provisions by ensuring the
protection of confidential and private patient data. “GoToMyPC fits in with our other security infrastructure that is HIPAA compliant,” he said. “The security features are not only important for HIPAA, but they provide good general data security.”

Lower TCI adds to the bottom line

When the school needed to replace a dial-in remote-access connection, the team initially considered a virtual private network (VPN). “We decided not to use a VPN because we needed a solution that was easy to implement and use,” said McKenzie. “A VPN would have required the involvement of our network staff and additional costs such as purchasing hardware.” However, with GoToMyPC, the team rolled out a secure remote-access solution within hours.

McKenzie didn’t need to perform an exhaustive return on investment (ROI) analysis to recognize the savings GoToMyPC would give the school. “We knew up front that GoToMyPC was going to save us money and time,” he said. “A big part of the ROI for us is that GoToMyPC didn’t take my network staff away from other projects.”

The administrative and reporting features of GoToMyPC are an important consideration for health providers who must comply with HIPAA provisions. “Accountability is an important part of HIPAA, so the reporting and logging that GoToMyPC provides fits in with our security policy,” said McKenzie. “The fact that we can control account creation, manage licenses and log connection information was very important to us.” Although many of the GoToMyPC security features are automatically enabled with no configuration required, administrators can further customize the security features they wish to implement. For example, administrators can disable specific remote-access features for their employees such as file transfer or enforce internal security policies by enabling a password-change feature. “Those are all important features for us,” McKenzie said.

Convenience of remote work sealed the deal

Even though McKenzie’s Information Systems team reaps substantial savings through remote access, ultimately, it was faculty and staff members who decided the school’s purchase of GoToMyPC. “During our evaluation we had a bad snowstorm that closed the school for three days,” McKenzie recalled. Thankfully, McKenzie had just introduced GoToMyPC to several users. “Almost every one of my GoToMyPC users wrote to me and told me how great it was to be able to continue working from home,” he said. Case in point: GoToMyPC was a lifesaver for one user who had a grant deadline and was able to submit the application on time. McKenzie said, “When my users could get all their data and still do their work even though there was 30 inches of snow on the ground, we were sold on GoToMyPC right then.”

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