

The NHS needed a more effective way to connect home and travelling workers to its network securely. Cable & Wireless was able to provide a secure and scalable way for these health professionals to access the information they need.

NHS secures remote access

The National Health Service (NHS) wanted to extend the facilities of its secure network, NHSnet, to health professionals working away from their bases, either at home or on visits to patients and other facilities.

Remote access would keep them in touch with their vital information, make more effective use of their on-call time and enable a wider range of people to work in the NHS.

Cable & Wireless came up with an easy-to-use secure solution that enables health professionals to connect to NHSnet using a variety of access methods.

The solution means that, for the first time, NHS professionals working from home can access their IT services with the same effectiveness and efficiency as they do from the office.

Health trusts that use the service don't incur any capital costs, since it is based on secure tokens and an authentication server that Cable & Wireless provides. Trusts can start off with one or two users and add more simply by buying extra tokens.

A prototyping phase led to the development of a second service, which gives a trust greater control of the areas of NHSnet that its users can access.

Remote requirement

Richard Handley, e-business manager for health at Cable & Wireless, says the NHS's Information Authority (NHS IA) had identified a need for new ways to connect to NHSnet. A key requirement was cost-effective access for health professionals working out of the office.

Cable & Wireless, as one of the NHSnet providers, was in a good position to come up with a solution quickly by adapting an existing service to the NHS's needs.

The new NHSnet remote access service builds on the experience Cable & Wireless has in providing NHSnet. It offers a secure remote access service using an internet virtual private network (VPN) and centrally-managed, token-based authentication.

Users can access the service via broadband, GPRS mobile phones or dial-up connections from any provider.

Full access, remotely

According to Phil Dickenson, the Cable & Wireless account manager on the project, the main benefit of the new secure remote access service is that it brings its users full access to the NHSnet, wherever they are.

"Anything you can do from your office you can do from home," he said. "It enables you to work from home properly and at a fixed cost."

Dickenson says radiologists, pathologists and other medical professionals who are called on to interpret images can benefit from the service. Such professionals often spend some of their time at home but 'on call', expected to provide an opinion at short notice.

For many such workers, being on call means having to be ready to drive to work at short notice to look at an image. This slows down diagnosis and also means they spend some of their on-call time travelling, rather than diagnosing.

Such professionals can use a broadband connection and the Cable & Wireless secure remote access service to receive images at home more quickly than travelling to work.

- **flexible, scalable and secure service**
- **extends full access to NHSnet to on-call, travelling and home-based health professionals**
- **easy to use**
- **managed by Cable & Wireless**



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NHS secures remote access

Enables flexible working

NHS Trusts are using secure remote access to enable other staff to work at home too, either to fit in with their circumstances or to relieve pressure on desk space.

This helps enlarge the pool of people who can work for the NHS — one trust director, for example, is unable to travel from home but works as normal using secure remote access.

The service is also extending NHSnet into patients' homes, where nurses can use a combination of GPRS mobile phones and a PDA to access patient records and look up appointments. IT support work can also be done from home, or extended from the trust to home workers.

How it works

A health professional who wants to use the new secure remote access service to connect to NHSnet needs an NHS-owned access device, be it a laptop, computer or PDA; a network connection and software to support the creation of a virtual private network between them and NHSnet; and a physical security token.

The token is used to generate a code that the user enters as they connect to NHSnet. This code becomes part of the authentication process and is the basis for encryption of all the communications between the user and NHSnet.

The advantage of using a physical token is that if a laptop or PDA is lost or stolen, the lack of the token will stop the machine being used to access NHSnet.

Straightforward

Phil Dickenson, the Cable & Wireless account manager on the project, said: "We've taken standard services and combined them to form a solution which meets the needs of the NHS. That's why it has been relatively straightforward."

The Cable & Wireless NHSnet secure remote access approach also means that users can connect to NHSnet from almost anywhere, including over third-party networks, because their data is encrypted as it leaves their machines. Users can feel safe to connect to NHSnet over GPRS mobile data connections or even by plugging into the local network of a site they are visiting.

Handley said: "The service is flexible, scalable and secure. If we weren't a provider of NHSnet we wouldn't be able to provide this solution so effectively."

The service was authorised by the NHS Information Authority, which manages NHSnet in November 2003. It is now used by more than 300 staff at 50 health trusts across the UK, with more users joining every day.

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eP/01.04

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