



Marquette General Health System Relies On F5's FirePass Controller For Secure, Web-Based Remote Access

Customer Profile

Company Name:

Marquette General Health System (MGHS)

Location:

Marquette, Michigan

Industry:

Health Care

Web site:

<http://www.mgh.org>

Company information:

- Approximately 2,900 employees
- A medical staff of more than 200 providing care in 54 specialties
- Annual operating budget of more than \$300 million

About MGHS

MGHS encompasses a regional medical center, numerous primary and specialty care physician offices, home health services, and an assisted living facility. MGHS partners with fourteen community hospitals through the Upper Peninsula Health Care Network (UPHCN) in Michigan's Upper Peninsula - an area approximately 325 miles across. Its mission is to provide access to primary and tertiary health services to improve the health status of the residents of Marquette County, the Upper Peninsula and the surrounding region.

For the fourth time in five years, MGHS has been named one of the nation's 100 most computerized health systems, according to the 2003 Most Wired Survey and Benchmarking Study, by Hospitals & Health Networks magazine.

Executive Summary

Marquette General Health System (MGHS) was looking to support their remote users, including physicians, employees and partners - but found that their existing remote access solution was too complex, limited in the applications and types of accessing devices it could support, and, mainly, difficult to set up and maintain. After an extensive evaluation of leading Web-based remote access products, MGHS chose F5's FirePass® controller. FirePass gave MGHS remote users secure and reliable access to authorized applications from any Web-enabled device, from any location, without requiring special software or configuration on the remote device, and with no modifications to the back-end resources being accessed.

Challenge

When you're dealing with numerous physician offices and hospitals spread over a 300-plus mile radius, the old standby of getting in one's car and driving to work or a central location to access or share information was rapidly becoming a less than promising means of efficient communication for MGHS staff, physicians, patients, and vendors.

"As our business continues to grow, our need to offer secure remote access to multiple types of users across multiple entities, including radiologists that required access to images remotely - grows as well," according to Greg Gagnon, Supervisor of Enterprise System and Services at Marquette General Health System.

In fact, for Gagnon, the needs of MGHS's radiologists and physicians were a key contributing factor in the search for a reliable remote access solution.

"A patient at a hospital might be scanned for a CT or MRI," Gagnon said. "A physician a hundred miles away, in the middle of the night, may need to perform a preliminary read on the image. But if he can't consistently get in (to the network), that can be troublesome."

Gagnon also acknowledged the need to provide access to various hospital programs and applications in a secure environment, including access to e-mail, hospital knowledge-based systems, Lotus Notes database, as well as the radiologists who required access to images from remote locations using a simple, Web-browser based solution.

The problem was that MGHS's existing remote access solution was complex, limited in the applications and types of accessing devices it could support, and, mainly, difficult to set up and maintain.

"Client software had to be installed on every workstation, and it was often unreliable," said Gagnon. "For example, a physician at his house - we'd install the remote access software. The physician would install some other program a day later on his computer that disrupted what we had previously installed. The bottom line was the physician was unable to gain remote access to data."

Gagnon then discovered a better remote access solution: the FirePass controller, from F5.



Solution

F5's FirePass controller is an SSL-VPN, appliance-based device that lets employees, customers and partners securely and reliably access authorized applications from any Web-enabled device, from any location. It requires no special software or configuration required on the remote device, and no modifications to the back-end resources being accessed.

For MGHS, it was an approach that also eliminated the typical remote access support burden while adding more application access, including e-mail, legacy applications, and remote control of desktop PCs via any standard Web browser.

FirePass offers key benefits for companies looking for remote access solutions, including:

- Granular access control - allows administrators to dynamically authorize different levels of application access based on the user and accessing device.
- Adaptive client security - FirePass adapts various security policies to ensure client integrity. For example, FirePass will check for active virus scan and personal firewall programs on corporate laptops.
- Strong authentication - FirePass offers flexible authentication against RADIUS, LDAP, and other authentication servers. It also supports two-factor authentication for more stringent security.
- Reduced cost - With no pre-installed client software and with streamlined administration, the FirePass controller lowers deployment and ongoing maintenance costs.
- Anywhere access - FirePass offers the broadest remote access. Employees, customers or partners can securely access critical applications and data from any Web-enabled device, all without pre-installed client software or application updates.

FirePass enables us to provide remote access very cost effectively and efficiently because it requires little support overhead and no modifications to network resources, user remote devices, or network architecture," said Gagnon.

Gagnon also liked the pinpoint control the FirePass device offered.

"We have many different applications and systems on our network, and the device allowed us to centralize vendors and audit where they go within the network. We can securely lock them to the applications they need."

Speaking of control, using the previous modem line solution, MGHS IT or system administrators had no way of logging who was accessing the network, when they were in, and what they were doing. Accordingly, if an access problem or failure occurred, administrators had no log of that information - making problem solving difficult.

"With FirePass, we now have that information," said Gagnon. "If something goes wrong in the middle of the night, we check the logs and can correct the problem quickly."

For a growing institution like MGHS, FirePass also fits the bill in terms of scalability, according to Gagnon.

"It just opened the door for a lot more usage, so our peer volume is about 221 users on the box," he said. "Before, with the secure remote, it was under two dozen. Now we have physicians arriving remotely to check their email and calendaring, and accessing knowledge-based systems for medical journals and things of that nature. They can do all of that from home now. Before (FirePass), they couldn't."



Besides physicians, radiologists and vendors, FirePass also provides MGHS pure IT remote access as well, and again, easier administration.

"We use the desktop feature. I can basically do everything that I can at my office from my house," Gagnon said. "Plus I have technicians that can use it to troubleshoot in the middle of the night a lot quicker by working right from their home desktop instead of driving into work to solve an issue. I love it. It's great."

For Gagnon and the staff at MGHS, the FirePass device has performed beyond expectations.

"The simple fact of less user frustration - being able to reliably get into the network from any location - is definitely a bonus," he said. "We also looked at about four other vendors for our radiology system. Either their solutions didn't work at all, or the images came across so slowly that it wouldn't have been acceptable to the radiologist. Time is money, especially when you're talking to a radiologist."

About F5

As the pioneer and global leader in Application Traffic Management, F5 continues to lead the industry by driving more intelligence into the network to deliver advanced application agility. F5 products ensure the secure and optimized delivery of applications to any user - anywhere. Through its flexible and cohesive architecture, F5 delivers unmatched value by dramatically improving the way organizations serve their employees, customers and constituents, while lowering operational costs.