

# Australian Healthcare Equipment securely connects its Sydney and Melbourne office via a Cisco **Virtual Private Network**



## Background

Australian Healthcare Equipment, trading as Murphy Healthcare Furniture in Sydney and Hencicare in Victoria, is an Australian company that has been designing, manufacturing and supplying healthcare furniture to aged care centres and hospitals since 1965.

Today, with a turnover of \$15 million and more than 70 staff in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, the company not only sells its furniture Australia-wide, but also exports it throughout Asia Pacific.

Their complete range of patient and resident furniture, designed to ISO 9001 quality accreditation, is manufactured at Sydney and Melbourne facilities. It includes hospital and care beds, bedroom, lounge and dining furniture and specialised healthcare equipment, all of which can be customised to clients' requirements.

Australian Healthcare Equipment also assists clients with the layout and colour scheme of furniture and can provide on-site training to nursing staff and maintenance.

## Challenge

In early 2002, Australian Healthcare Equipment was facing a number of challenges. As a legacy of having Melbourne and Sydney offices that were not closely integrated and linked, the company was experiencing costly duplication of effort and stock manufacturing, leading to inventory control issues.

Scott Cutler, System Manager, knew this could be avoided with closer integration and better communication between the State offices. For example, if one office received an order and the stock was available in the other, the order could be fulfilled more quickly and cost-effectively by shipping the stock interstate.

So he was tasked with installing a centralised Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution that would provide more manageability and flexibility company-wide. Staff could manage the financial status 24/7, control stock inventory and logistics, log staff and customer communications, offer service and support and place orders.

Finding the ERP solution was not so much of a challenge as putting the technology in place to support it. Cutler knew that when introducing a common ERP system accessible to staff in both offices, speed of connection and security of data would be paramount.

## Solution

Clive Flax, The Specializt Pty Ltd, a Cisco VPN/Security Specialised Partner, was called in to investigate a secure method of linking the two offices with a fast broadband connection so that they could both connect to and share data on a common server.

The Melbourne office was situated in a complex that already had ADSL link in place, enabling Scott Cutler to have a 1.5/256k ADSL connection installed. The location of the Sydney office was far more problematic. Being in Chipping Norton put it outside the range of planned cable or ADSL facilities. The option of installing Frame Relay or ISDN between the two sites was beyond the budget, and using a dial-up would have been too slow for accessing a common centralised server. The smartest option was to install 256K Frame Relay to the local ISP, iPrimus, and then use the Internet as the carrier between Sydney and Melbourne.

Because confidential information would travel across the Internet, he needed to install a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to provide the level of security required by Australian Healthcare Equipment.

David Akins, Territory Account Manager, Cisco Systems, comments: “VPNs enable any business to cost-effectively extend the reach of their networks to include smaller branch offices, remote workers, telecommuters and even their business partners.

“For any company steering towards centralised business processes, VPNs are a vital addition in technology to ensure the security of any confidential data shared amongst offices.”

To provide Internet access for Australian Healthcare Equipment, Flax installed Cisco 800 series routers – one in Melbourne and one in Sydney. The 800 series has enhanced security measures and low cost of ownership, making it ideal for Virtual Private Networks (VPN) when integrated with a PIX 506 Firewall.

Flax comments: “The Cisco PIX 506 Firewall provides robust, enterprise-class security services including stateful inspection firewalling, standards-based IPsec VPN and intrusion detection and prevention.”

Intended for remote office/branch office applications, the Cisco PIX 506 Firewall provides up to 20Mbps of firewall throughput and up to 16 Mbps of 168-bit Triple Data Encryption Standard (3DES) VPN throughput – the most cost-effective secure encryption software available. It is the mainstay of the IPsec, which encrypts Australian Healthcare Equipment’s data sent over the Internet. IPsec acts as the network layer protecting and authenticating IP packets sent between Australian Healthcare Equipment’s two routers and encrypts the data as it sends it, ensuring data integrity and data confidentiality.

Flax also installed Microsoft Windows 2000 and Microsoft’s Terminal Server for Australian Healthcare Equipment enabling staff to work remotely on the centralised ERP software. Now staff in Melbourne can run a client on their PC very similar to web browser, log in to the Sydney server through the VPN, and execute their applications locally.

Another key component of Terminal Server is that it supports the hardware and software security devices with a further three levels of encryption, making it extremely difficult for Australian Healthcare Equipment’s data to ever be comprised.

To access the Internet, Clive Flax installed two email and Internet servers which work in conjunction with each other and the Cisco PIX 506 Firewalls. This allows both servers to browse the Internet and receive mail independently and without compromising the speed of each other. It also provides server redundancy, where if one server fails, the other can carry on providing web access and email communication.

## Results

Installing a secure Virtual Private Network supporting an ERP solution has had an immediate benefit for staff at Australian Healthcare Equipment. From email access, to administration and database management, there’s been a marked increase in productivity with staff able to respond more easily to all kinds of issues, from immediate answers to sales and manufacturing status enquiries, to more accurate accounting and faster shipping of finished stock.

Scott Cutler comments. “The great thing about the system is that 35 to 40 people can access the ERP program at the same time. While staff in Melbourne are updating current stock inventory, a sales order can be processed by the Sydney office requesting those items to be shipped from Melbourne to a client in Adelaide. The sales force can also access the system remotely, updating new sales orders, seeing what stock is available, anticipated manufacturing times or viewing the status of an existing order.”

Another big plus has been the reliability of the Virtual Private Network, which has meant that the ERP solution has been completely dependable. Scott Cutler comments: “it just sits there, doing its job 24/7 and, as a result has given staff the confidence to change the way they work. We had no idea how much simpler tasks would become. We’re able to respond much faster to sales enquiries, and to shipping out orders and adjusting stock levels. This provides a stable platform from which we can grow our company.

“One of the greatest advantages is the seamless visibility of information from the various State offices. We’ve integrated information from our legacy systems into our real-time front office ERP application, which means the management team now always has access to the most up-to-date information possible.

“Our ERP solution manages our sales activities, marketing programs and service functions so that we can instantly see what is happening. And with the centralised database, there’s no more duplication of effort and no one is getting bogged down in repetitious paper work.

“Another benefit is the reduced phone bill, which is the result of staff using email to communicate. Sales staff are also freer to focus on making sales calls and following up on leads rather than spending hours completing paperwork or constantly calling the office to be updated on the status of products, orders and invoices.”

## Partnerships

Strong, reliable partnerships are central to the success of any secure VPN rollout. When Australian Healthcare Equipment implemented their solution, Scott Cutler was confident in both the technology and the solutions providers he had chosen.

“While some people might view using the Internet to transfer confidential company information as risky, I knew Cisco had already implemented many successful VPN solutions for corporations that were running smoothly. It was clear that a VPN was the most cost-effective and simplest solution for us and that it more than provided the robust security and failsafe mechanisms we required to keep our business running 24/7.

“Cisco VPN/Security Specialised Partner, the Specializt Pty Ltd. has a track record for successfully implementing VPN solutions in a variety of scenarios and in helping companies leverage the technology to get the maximum benefit from the most cost-effective solution. From our point of view, the implementation was a complete success with many unforeseen benefits as well as those we predicted, which is always a bonus.”

David Akins, Territory Account Manager, Cisco Systems, comments: “Australian Healthcare Equipment has leveraged VPN technology to achieve improvements with business process and in so doing has realised some quite significant cost savings. By working closely with one of Cisco’s specialised partners, they have received the benefits of sound implementation and a high level of professional advice required to achieve their business objectives.”



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