



Saber Healthcare Group

Aerohive WLAN gives healthcare provider edge in patient care

Requirements

- Centrally- and easily-managed wireless network architecture
- Reliable wireless connectivity for highly distributed environment
- Reliably support mission critical Wi-Fi-based EHR applications
- Scalability to support wireless retrieval and input of patient data

Benefits

- Using HiveManager to configure and manage entire WLAN from central location
- Segmented WLAN into three secure networks for guests/residents/corporate
- Running PointClickCare web-based EMR/EHR application over Wi-Fi
- Improved quality of life for patients by providing them with Internet access

Saber Healthcare Group has been on a steady growth path due to a series of skilled healthcare facilities acquisitions that have earned it an accumulated 40 years of healthcare experience. With 50 facilities and counting across Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia, Saber is committed to providing quality care to the people of its community. Holding true to its motto, “Caring for Life,” Saber strives to provide thoughtful, quality care to the many individuals and families that come through the doors of its facilities, and it depends on leading-edge technology in this effort.

Challenge

Expanding from a single building facility to multiple skilled nursing facilities translated to the need to deploy an easy-to-manage wireless network – one that would provide seamless and reliable connectivity to buildings that are distributed across vastly different locations.

“Using HiveManager to manage everything from one central location and push out configurations to all APs is extremely efficient and it saves us money on travel. We are a small IT department with three employees and 50 locations, so being able to streamline things and run as smoothly as we do, has been a significant help.”

—Curtis McEwen
Saber Healthcare Group’s Director of IT

With this challenging environment in mind, Saber had identified several objectives when it set out to deploy its wireless network. The guiding principle behind its requirements was its desire to remain on the cutting edge of healthcare, and therefore the network must support healthcare-centric initiatives such as electronic medical records (EMR) and using wireless kiosks located around the building to plug in, or retrieve, patient information.

“We are pushing out applications that will allow us to provide the best care to residents,” says Curtis McEwen, Saber’s Director of IT. “We needed a wireless infrastructure that would reliably support these technologies.”

While the business requirement for a wireless network was critical, Saber also recognized the need to provide its patients, and their visitors, with access to internet.

“Our patients and their visitors are used to having access to the internet 24x7. Giving them access to social applications such as Facebook or Flickr, or applications such video streaming and games, has a positive impact on patient recovery,” says McEwen.

Solution

Saber began investigating WLAN vendors because its existing 3Com Unified Switch solution, which had been deployed in a few of its buildings, had become obsolete. Saber also considered Cisco, Aruba and HP, but none of them met its requirements for a distributed solution, intelligent APs and centralized management capabilities.

Aerohive's HiveAPs provide secure fast roaming, ease of management, and state-of-the-art security without network controllers or overlay networks. Instead, software in the HiveAPs enables them to self-organize into groups called "hives", to share network control information, and to deliver QoS, identity-based policy enforcement and other advanced functionality.

"Aerohive presented itself as the best opportunity because it offers centralized management –we desperately needed this functionality, but we weren't even aware of a solution such as Aerohive's until we started investigating," said McEwen. "I have no desire to use Cisco—it's always been a pain to manage and then the cost structure is prohibitive. I was excited to learn about Aerohive and its architectural approach to distributed wireless networking."

McEwan was also impressed with Aerohive's customer service, and this was another key deciding factor in selecting Aerohive's wireless networking solution over the competition.

"The Aerohive team always returned our phone calls, and they were extremely responsive during both our evaluation period and our deployment," said McEwen. "I got the feeling Aerohive was partnering with us, and I appreciate that very much."

Saber has thus far successfully deployed five locations and will eventually deploy more than 500 access points, with an average of about ten to eleven access points per facility. Given the large number of sites, and distributed environment, Aerohive's solution is proving cost-effective because Saber doesn't need to deploy redundant controllers at every site.

Results

Aerohive's wireless solution is serving as the infrastructure beneath several applications that are critical to Saber's ability to provide the best quality healthcare to its patients.

Saber is utilizing PointClickCare, a web-based EMR/EHR application that streamlines and connects clinical, billing, and administration processes to maximize reimbursements, enhance quality of care, improve operational efficiencies and increase staff productivity.

Saber will leverage PointClickCare along with wireless kiosks located around their buildings and its Aerohive Wi-Fi network for electronic retrieval and submission of clinical information. "This is extremely valuable to skilled nursing facilities because this data is used for reimbursement of state funds," said McEwan.

Another application that will eventually leverage Wi-Fi is Accunurse, a voice-activated, interactive care and communication system that gives nurses up-to-the minute resident care information by speaking into a small lightweight headset. Using Accunurse, healthcare professionals can pull a wide variety of reports in seconds to proactively monitor resident care and staff progress throughout the day. Saber plans to eventually run Accunurse over Wi-Fi.

Because applications play such a key role in patient care, Saber is benefitting from the fact that Aerohive's architecture eliminates the single-point-of-failure problem that plagues controller-based solutions.

Also important to Saber—Aerohive's solution is easy to manage and provides better visibility into the network. To that end, Saber is using Aerohive's HiveManager Network Management System (NMS) on a VMware appliance to manage its highly distributed wireless network.

HiveManager NMS enables simple policy creation, firmware upgrades, configuration updates, and centralized monitoring throughout an entire Aerohive deployment, whether building-, campus-, or global-wide, from within a single console.

"Using HiveManager to manage everything from one central location and push out configurations to all APs is extremely efficient and it saves us money on travel," said McEwan. "We are a small IT department with three employees and 50 locations, so being able to streamline things and run as smoothly as we do, has been a significant help."

During the deployment phase, Saber contracted with a vendor to do the cabling and plug in the APs, but from there the HiveManager NMS did the rest. "Because everything is centralized, we just push out the configuration and the APs are up and running immediately."

As for security, Saber uses the stateful firewall in every HiveAP to segment its WLAN into three separate virtual LANs (VLANs) and SSIDs for guests and residents, corporate, and for a legacy corporate network that will eventually be phased out.

"If a resident brings in malware, it can't attach to the corporate network. The more Aerohive is taking care of this, the less we have to do and I like that," said McEwan.

While the business benefits of its Aerohive deployment are significant, placing resident and guest access as a priority speaks to Saber's "Caring for Life" mantra and its desire to provide the best patient care possible.

"Having internet access provides a better quality of life for residents. They want to be able to come in and do their occupational therapy. They want access to the internet so they can talk to their kids or grandkids on Skype," said McEwan. "Not having that in this day in age is a big no-no."



Contact us today to learn how your organization can benefit from an Aerohive wireless LAN architecture.

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