

CASE STUDY

SD-WAN prepares healthcare provider for spikes in telemedicine

With doctor visits occurring in creative places like mobile RVs, schools, and via video conferences, rural patient populations are dependent on telemedicine and digital care backed by an always-on network that can reach remote locations. This is particularly the case for one non-profit healthcare provider on a mission to deliver quality care for everyone--regardless of their ability to pay. Their specialty is finding innovative ways to reach rural and vulnerable communities in need of affordable healthcare services.

Any outages in connectivity force the provider's nurses and doctors to revert back to paper record keeping processes and stop dental practices in their tracks. These setbacks reduce the number of patients that can be seen, and were key challenges company leaders were determined to fix. "Sometimes, we had to turn dental patients away," explained the Director of IT. "In healthcare, outages are unacceptable." This is how their network modernization initiative got started, and not only would it solve the problem at hand, it would also prove essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Solution: Treating more patients with 5X more bandwidth

The CEO of the company recognizes digital transformation as the path forward in improving access to healthcare. He was the one who sparked the company's early adoption of a cloud EHR system, cloud communications, and telemedicine. But cloud migration took a toll on their existing network. Their infrastructure wasn't suited to efficiently route traffic to their rural service areas. Latency was the core problem, as was the customer service associated with their current network provider.

"The latency got to the point where it was unworkable given the requirements of cloud EHR and telemedicine. Never once did our provider say, let's rehome the circuits and see if we can remove the number of hops. The service quality was always my fault, my equipment, and the burden was on me to prove that it wasn't," explained the Director of IT.



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Head of IT

non-profit healthcare provider

Working with technology consulting firm 4Tier Advisors, the Director began evaluating SD-WAN solutions that would boost healthcare continuity with a hybrid connectivity approach. Masergy was selected for its reliable SD-network. “Masergy had the biggest footprint, industry-leading SLAs, and the best customer satisfaction,” he said, adding how the implementation team worked around the clock. “Masergy installed circuits and set up activations even at odd hours.”

SD-WAN made a night-and-day difference on patient outcomes, he explained. “With SD-WAN, network traffic automatically flows to where it needs to go. Even if doctors are on a video call with a patient and the network drops a connection, they don’t lose the call. The only real outages we experience now are when a bad storm and the electricity is out,” said the Director of IT. Since the implementation, the company has seen a fivefold increase in bandwidth, as well as IT cost reductions. And in 2020, these improvements would soon become much more meaningful than anyone could have ever anticipated.



Results: Forward-facing vision creates COVID-19 preparedness

Before the pandemic, telemedicine supported an estimated 10-20% of doctor visits, but usage skyrocketed during March and April 2020. Since then, usage has leveled off at 50%, but that initial spike was a true test of the network. Nonetheless, that test never made the IT team nervous, according to the Director. A network engineer by trade, he understood the strength and agility of the new underlying architecture, which gave him complete confidence. “Our old network would have collapsed under the weight of what we’re doing today. COVID-19 spiked our telemedicine usage to 100%, and our Masergy network never even hiccuped,” he explained.

That’s because telemedicine was the primary focus of their modernization effort. “It wasn’t just luck,” he said.

Recognized results

- Increased bandwidth 5X
- Enabled telemedicine spikes of up to 100%
- Reduced IT costs
- Decreased network outages

“Without our CEO’s forward-facing vision, we would have never been this ready for COVID, and without the reliability that we get from Masergy, we wouldn’t be able to see all the patients we’re seeing now. Our network is making healthcare safer and more accessible during COVID.”

This wasn’t the only “lifesaver,” as the Director put it. Masergy’s willingness to help the company participate in the Universal Service Administrative Company’s Rural Health Program has also been a huge help. This federally funded assistance program provides healthcare companies discounted access to telecommunications services. But McCord also describes his customer experience as a game changing for IT operations.

Masergy proactively notifies clients within 5 minutes of an outage, so McCord knows what is happening in the network even before an IT ticket is opened by an employee. Troubleshooting the network is also much easier with Masergy, he reports. “I almost fell out of my chair, because I had never had a vendor say, ‘Hey, we’re sorry. The outage was on us. A route got changed, but we found it. We fixed it, and we apologize. We have already credited your account.’ In my 25 years of experience, that kind of thing only happens with Masergy.”

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