

Fully Hosted Solution Delivers Best in Class Service to Medical Professionals



4Net Technologies Ltd has delivered a fully managed, centrally hosted, resilient IT and Communications Solution to Assura

Medical to provide their customers with state-of-the-art enhanced services, diagnostics and out-patient services.

Assura Medical, formed in 2006, is an operating division of Assura Group Limited, listed on the London Stock Exchange. Through collaborative joint venture arrangements with GPs Assura Medical's aim is to create an environment in a primary care setting for managing the provision of enhanced services, diagnostics and out-patient services which are currently being carried out in hospitals.

Assura Medical also helps GPs to maximise the opportunities of Practice Based Commissioning by helping to optimise care pathways and providing leading edge IT and business support. They deliver their services, via purpose built, state-of-the-art medical facilities built alongside or integrated within Primary Care Centres.

The Vision

Assura had an initial funding available to develop around 30 facilities over an eighteen month period, with the capability to build a further one hundred sites over the following 3-4 years. Their vision was to provide a fully managed working environment for medical professionals, similar to a serviced office environment, but with medical equipment, from MRI scanners to syringes with health facilities providing the best possible patient care.

Key to the success of the medical centres was the provision of an innovative and secure IT infrastructure which would provide Assura with a competitive advantage and ensure Business Continuity and security of sensitive patient information. All sites needed access to a single, core

business application to enable central management of patient information and appointments.

As Assura Medical was still in its infancy the company had no internal IT resource. This necessitated the outsourcing of their entire IT and communications infrastructure to an organisation with the flexibility and ability to deliver solutions that would support the changing requirements of the business.

The Solution

4Net designed and delivered a fully managed, centrally hosted, resilient IT & Communications solution. Core to the solution was the Wide Area Network. Managed by 4Net, this was based on MPLS technology to prioritise voice over data to ensure toll quality voice calls both between sites, and for a central PSTN breakout from the network to reduce call charges and line rental costs.

By using a centrally hosted model, all remote Assura Centre sites had access to all the same applications and services. This reduced the timescales and costs associated with implementing new sites, significantly reduced ongoing service and management costs and improved speed of response.

4Net installed all the core HP servers, including the main business application and Microsoft applications such as Exchange, Office, etc and the Avaya telephony servers within a secure data centre. Business applications were then delivered over the newly installed 4Net MPLS network to fully managed PC's at the Assura Centres via Citrix Thin client. Data backup and anti-virus were also managed centrally from this point. The Avaya servers manage local survivable gateways at each remote site.

4Net's data centre is a purpose built environment specifically designed for security and business continuity and includes on-site power generation systems, and three separate fire suppression systems.



Centralised Secure Hosting of applications and systems, along with a common IT and communications architecture across all sites enabled staff to be more flexible and mobile with the ability to work from any site, from anywhere, at any time. Clients, with the right security access, can quickly log on to systems when necessary.

Centralised voicemail, and a Tiger Call Management System, provides detailed call billing, allowing Assura to bill call costs to each tenant or client. All users have roaming log-ins which gives them the ability to log-in at any site. 4Net fully manage the telephony systems and provide all service and support, moves and changes.

4Net designed and delivered a centralised e-mail and desktop solution, based on hosting the Exchange server, Domain Controller, backup systems and File server. These were then delivered via Citrix to provide a standard secure desktop for the Assura Centre's.

An Alcatel OmniSwitch PoE network was installed to deliver data services and IP Telephony to all the Assura Medical Centres, along with Alcatel/Aruba Omni Wireless solutions to give guest users and tenant's instant internet access.

The Challenges

4Net's main challenge was to ensure that they met Assura's timescales of only 2 months to install the core systems, data network and have the first centre up and running. Just days prior to the first centre opening, it was broken into and almost half of the IT equipment stolen. 4Net had to meet this additional obstacle and order, configure and install the stolen equipment within 4 days of go live.

4Net succeeded in meeting their deadlines through the excellence of their project management team, who directed and managed various third parties, to overcome the challenges and to implement the core network and telephony - delivering the first site on time and on budget.

The Results

Assura has gained many benefits from the new solution. As all applications are hosted, new sites can be added relatively quickly and, with no need for local servers, the costs for software, installation and services are greatly reduced. A standard model was also developed for each site, rendering the design and delivery process quicker and easier, requiring less resource and expense.

The solution is extremely scalable and totally secure but still enables staff or clients to log on at any site and have IT functionality, almost immediately. With Assura centres throughout the country, managing and supporting these sites as stand alone units would be expensive and resource intensive. However as all systems are centrally hosted and managed there is a single point of administration and support, reducing costs and improving efficiencies, and reducing site visits.

This has means that Assura have been able to deliver leading edge IT services within a short timescales and without the cost of recruiting a large in house IT department.

Other savings can be seen through reduced call and line rental costs through Voice over IP breakout and reduced equipment costs at each site.

Standard Systems at each site mean that any staff member or client who goes to any site understands how to use the systems, such as phones, PC applications and Wireless access thereby reducing training costs and the number of staff needed on site at any time.

Assura's Operations Director, Chris Sanders said: 'The solution was designed and implemented as documented and with great professionalism. Assura Medical have benefited immediately from the service and solutions provided by 4net.'

To Assura it is important that they are seen to be providing best in class services to their clients. Delivering the latest IT services to their clients in a standard manner at every site, raises their profile and improves the perception of the Assura brand.